SISTER NIVEDITA
OF
RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA

PRAVRAJIKA ATMAPRANA



SISTER NIVEDITA GIRLS' SCHOOL
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The mothers heart, the hero's will

the sweetness of the southern breeze,

the sacred charm and strength that dwell

on Aryan altars, flaming, free;

all these be yours, and many more,

no ancient soul could dream before –

Be thou to India's future son

The mistress, servant, friend, in one.

With the blessings of

Vivekananda

[Written to Sister Nivedita on September 22, 1900]

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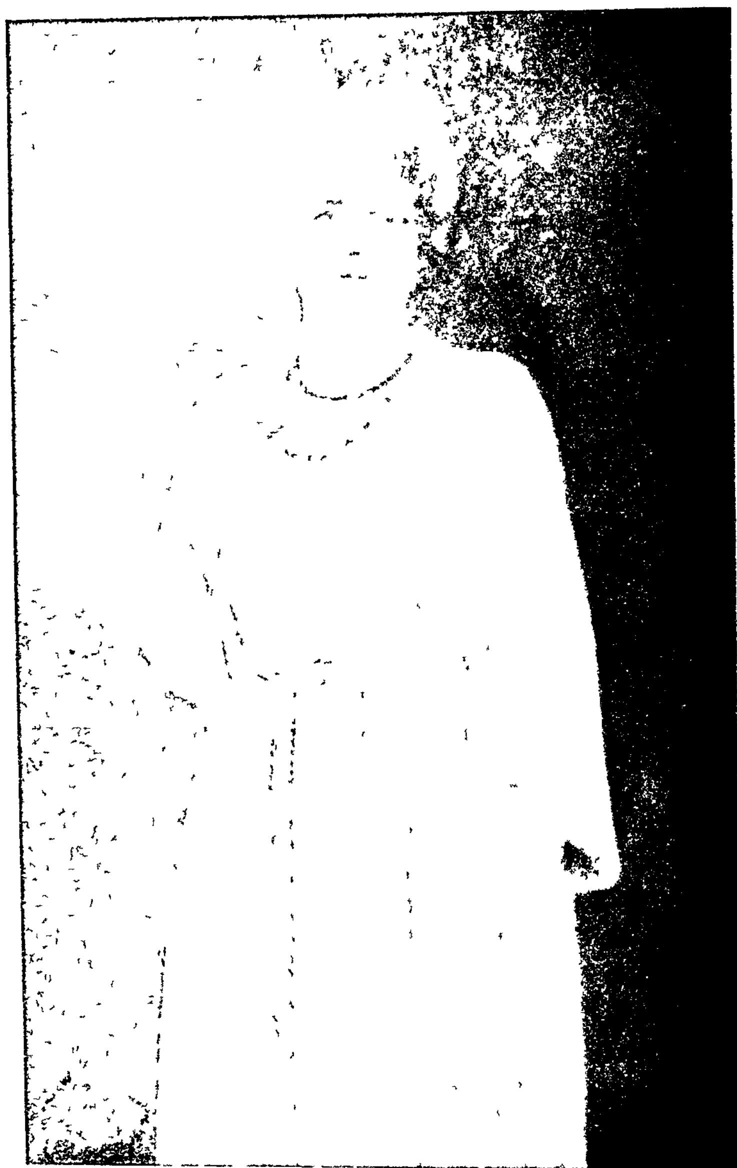
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The Lord bless thee and keep thee!
The Lord lift up the light of His
countenance upon thee,
And be gracious unto thee,
And give thee peace!
Send thee help from the Sanctuary,
And strengthen thee out of
Zion!
Give thee thy heart's desire, and
fulfil all thy mind!

Nivedita

[Facsimile of Sister Nivedita's handwriting]



Sister Nivedita

1. *Early Life*

YOUNG MARY NOBLE was feeling anxious before the birth of her first child. Like all religious women she vowed that if her child was born safe she would dedicate it to the service of the Lord.

And so was the vow fulfilled. The child, Margaret Elizabeth Noble, lived a great life of consecration and earned the name 'Nivedita' — the Dedicated — from her Guru, Swami Vivekananda. Disciplewise, in true Hindu style, she offered the fruits of her labours at the feet of her Guru and Parama-Guru by adding to her name 'Nivedita' the attribute 'Of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda', thus pointing out the sanctuary whence she got light and strength.

Nivedita's life can be divided into three distinct periods. First, from her birth to the time she met Swami Vivekananda. Second, from her being aware of the great call in her life to the passing away of her Guru. And third, when she emerged as a passionate, selfless worker.

Thus runs the life-story of a dedicated soul.

Nivedita's original name was Margaret Elizabeth Noble. She was born at Dungannon, Co. Tyrone on October 28, 1867. Her grandfather was John Noble. The Nobles were of Scottish descent and had been settled in Ireland for about five centuries.

A mighty upsurge of freedom had arisen in Ireland in the nineteenth century. The formation of the Fenian National Militia and the Home Rule and Land League movements were all waves of agitation against the tyranny and suppression by the Anglican rulers. The nature of the national struggle changed with every new agitation, but the goal remained unchanged and it demanded the services of all Irishmen who were imbued with the spirit of nationalism and duty to their country. To this, Margaret's grandparents contributed their mite.

John Noble, a minister of the Wesleyan church in North Ireland, acquired some distinction as a preacher. He was happily married to Margaret Elizabeth Nealus. Their fourth child was Samuel Richmond. After the death of John Noble when he was forty years of age, the responsibility of bringing up her children entirely devolved on Margaret Noble.

Samuel Richmond was prepared for the Congregational Ministry at the Lancashire Independent College. In time he married Mary Isabel Hamilton, whose father too had participated in the Home Rule Movement.

Samuel Richmond settled in the town of Dungannon in North Ireland, where their first daughter, Margaret, was born. Following in his father's footsteps, Samuel left with his wife for Manchester, to become a student of theology of the Wesleyan church. When he was ordained he was sent to Oldham, but in 1876 he chose Great Torrington in Devonshire as his field of work Little Margaret, who had been left with her grandmother all these years, now joined her parents. By this time she had a sister, May, and a brother, Richmond.

Margaret was her father's favourite, and whenever he conducted services or tended the poor, she accompanied him; but the strain of a hard and simple life told upon Samuel's health so that he died at the early age of thirty-four. He had not saved much for the family, and after a time Mary Noble lost heart staying alone with the three children in a foreign land, so she returned with them to Ireland and to her father, Hamilton.

Her father's religious zeal had made a deep impression on Margaret and from her grandfather Hamilton she imbibed the spirit of freedom and love for Ireland.

In due time arrangements were made for putting Margaret and May into the Halifax College for their education.

2. *A Student and a Teacher*

THE HALIFAX COLLEGE was run by the Chapter of the Congregationalist Church and the college and hostel life offered new opportunities to Margaret. To escape the boredom of the strictly routine life in the hostel, Margaret devoted herself with zeal to studies which intensified her desire to know more, and with her twin powers of concentration and perseverance, she made rapid progress. It was here that she developed an interest in music, art and the natural sciences.

After passing her final examination at the age of seventeen in 1884, she took to teaching at a school in Keswick. In 1886 she took up a post at Wrexham. She loved teaching and devoted herself to it with great enthusiasm. She had inherited from her father the spirit of service and love for the poor, and Wrexham, a mining centre, afforded her great scope for a work that she liked very much.

Here she met a young engineer from Wales, with whom she had common ideas and interests. Their acquaintance soon developed into friendship and then later matured into love. They dreamt of being united in life, but before their engagement could be announced, the young man fell ill and died. Margaret was now alone and friendless, and it was with a heavy heart that she left Wrexham for Chester in 1889.

Her mind now naturally turned towards her family. May, her younger sister, was a teacher in Liverpool and Richmond being a college student in the same town, their mother was asked to come over from Ireland to live with them. Thus, after years of separation, a fresh home was set up and Margaret came occasionally from Chester to stay with them.

Happily settled with her own family, Margaret engaged herself with keener interest in education than ever before. Her studies acquainted her with the ideas of the Swiss educational reformer Pestalozzi and with those of the German, Froebel, both of whom laid emphasis on the importance of

the pre-school age of the child. According to them, education should begin by gratifying and cultivating the normal aptitude of the child for exercise, play, observation, imitation and construction.

This novel and natural method of teaching greatly appealed to Margaret. Already a group of enthusiastic teachers in England had taken to this new thought and had tried to put it into practice In Liverpool, Margaret became acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Logemann and Mis. de Leeuw, all of whom advocated the 'New Education'. Through them, she was introduced to the 'Sunday Club', where her talks and writings were highly appreciated.

At the end of two years, Mrs. de Leeuw invited Margaret to help her to start a 'new' school in London. She agreed and in 1890 left Chester and settled with her mother in Wimbledon.

The new experiment gave Margaret great joy. As she gained experience, she determined to start a school of her own, and so, in 1892, she began to work independently. Here there were no restrictive set methods There was no formal learning Children were taught to do things, it was all play, but as they played, they learned. Among the teachers appointed by Margaret was one Mr Ebenezer Cook, a well-known painter of children's portraits Through colour and brush he introduced the children to painting. Margaret was much interested in his work and it was from him that she learned to be a critic of art.

Gradually Margaret grew into a mature educator. Her self-confidence grew along with her intellectual acumen and experience and she became acquainted in London with some of the most learned and influential people of the time. Among them were Lady Ripon and Lady Isabel Margesson. They had formed a small literary coterie, which later came to be known as the Sesame Club. A keen reader and thinker, Margaret soon became an active and enthusiastic member of this club where famous writers, such as Bernard Shaw and Thomas Huxley, were regular speakers Besides literature, discussions were held on ethics, politics and kindred subjects In 1892, when the Home Rule Bill for Ireland was before Parliament, Margaret spoke fearlessly in favour of it.

Thus it continued with Margaret until 1895. In that year, however, the great Hindu Yogi, Swami Vivekananda, came to London to preach Vedanta, and within a few months Margaret's life unexpectedly changed its course and purpose.

3. *Seeker of Truth*

ENVIRONMENT PRODUCES an infinite complexity of feelings and yearnings Some of these find expression in external work, while some remain dormant. Margaret's external activities brought about an unfoldment of the strength and subtlety of her intellectual understanding and an expansion of her natural faculties But, at this time, her deep religious feeling agitated her profoundly She felt uncertain and insecure, for though, since her childhood, she had come under various religious influences, none of them could satisfy her.

She was born of religious parents. Her father was a minister of the church and she had inherited his religious fervour. As a student she had been in a boarding school run by the Chapter of the Congregationalist Church. When she was about fifteen, the Tractarian Movement, which sought to establish the supremacy and dignity of the church above the state, caught her imagination What appealed to her most in it was the colour which it introduced into its services and the importance it attached to symbols and sacraments It taught her the value of tradition. But the Tractarian Movement proved too rigid and illiberal for Margaret's freedom-loving and emotional nature and she left it.

Later, in London, Margaret was to join the Broad Church School of the Church of England, but its teachings seemed to her full of cynicism, so that it could not satisfy her religious emotions Margaret withdrew herself from these ecclesiastical systems, for she was in search of a more Christian and a more human religion. At one time she turned to the study of the natural sciences and for some years Buddha and his doctrines attracted her attention; yet she always felt that she had not found the right path in her quest for Truth. Neither the church nor its doctrines could sustain her till she met Swami Vivekananda in 1895. His teachings seemed to light up all her previous experiences and gave her a new life with a new meaning.

To quote her own words about her earnest efforts as a seeker after Truth, in a lecture delivered at the Hindu Ladies' Social Club in Bombay, in 1902, she said:

> I was born and bred an Englishwoman and up to the age of eighteen I was trained and educated as English girls are. Christian religious doctrines were of course early instilled into me. Even from my girlhood I was inclined to venerate all religious teachings and I devotedly worshipped the child Jesus, loved Him with my whole heart for the self-sacrifices He always willingly underwent, and felt I could not worship Him enough for His crucifying Himself to bestow salvation on the human race. But after the age of eighteen I began to harbour doubts as to the truth of the Christian doctrines. Many of them began to seem to me false and incompatible with Truth. These doubts grew stronger and stronger and at the same time my faith in Christianity tottered more and more. For seven years I was in this wavering state of mind, very unhappy and yet very, very eager to seek the Truth. I shunned going to church and yet sometimes my longing to bring restfulness to my spirit impelled me to rush into church and be absorbed in the service in order to feel at peace within, as I had hitherto done, and as others round me were doing. But alas! no peace, no rest was there for my troubled soul all eager to know the Truth.
>
> During the seven years of wavering it occurred to me that in the study of natural science I should surely find the Truth I was seeking. So I began ardently to study how this world was created and all things in it and I discovered that in the laws of Nature at least there was consistency, but it made the doctrines of the Christian religion seem all the more inconsistent. Just then I happened to get a life of Buddha and in it I found that here also was a child who lived ever so many centuries before the child Christ, but whose sacrifices were no less self-abnegating than those of the other. This dear child took a strong hold on me and for the next three years I plunged into the study of the religion of Buddha, and became more and more convinced that the

> salvation he preached was decidedly more consistent with the Truth than the preachings of the Christian religion.
>
> And now came the turning point for my faith. .. The Swami I met was no other than Swami Vivekananda who afterwards became my Guru and whose teachings have given the relief that my doubting spirit had been longing for so long.

The characteristic thought mood of cultured Europe then was one of doubt and negation There was lack of feeling and faith in all spheres of life It was natural, therefore, that an earnest seeker after Truth like Margaret, who could not adapt the religious instructions of her childhood to her own mental growth, experienced an anguished sense of uncertainty and void in her being. Her own generous outlook and a readiness to get Truth from whatever direction it came, however, led her to accept the Swami's Vedantic doctrine as a whole.

> To not a few of us, the words of Swami Vivekananda came as living water to men perishing of thirst. Many of us had been conscious for years past of that growing uncertainty and despair with regard to Religion, which has beset the intellectual life of Europe for half a century. Belief in the dogmas of Christianity had become impossible to us, and we had no means, such as we now hold, by which to separate the doctrinal shell from the kernel of reality in our faith. To these the Vedanta has given intellectual confirmation and philosophical expression of their own mistrusted intuitions. "The peoples that walked in darkness have seen a great light."

In 1895, the Swami came to London. The 'Hindu Yogi' gained popularity in a very short time and one day Lady Isabel Margesson invited Swami Vivekananda to her home. Among the few friends who were invited to meet him and hear him speak was Margaret. Many of her friends knew of her spiritual aspirations and one of them suggested that the Hindu Yogi might help her in her quest for Truth. Would she not like to go? Out of curiosity to know what was happening, Margaret accepted the invitation. Events were slowly guiding her to her destiny.

4. *Swami Vivekananda the Master*

IN THE LAST QUARTER of the nineteenth century a tidal wave of spirituality arose in India that was destined to flood not only that vast land, but also the parched uplands of the distant countries of Europe and America. At the source of this mighty force was Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of the spiritual greatness that has been India's for countless ages, and his disciple Swami Vivekananda, whom he made an instrument for the awakening of the spiritual consciousness of men and women in many lands.

It was by Divine Sanction that Swami Vivekananda left the ancient shores of India and that his splendid and dauntless spirit led him to preach the Vedantic doctrines in the West.

After Sri Ramakrishna had left his body, Swami Vivekananda went on a pilgrimage which only came to an end at Cape Comorin. For months he travelled all over India, meeting and mixing with all classes of people, sharing the food and bed of a pariah one day, the next day accepting honours from Maharajas and learned Pandits. India he always loved, but till now she had been a mystery to him Now she was a revelation. India was still rich in her spiritual heritage, but was impoverished physically. The poverty and weakness of the people made him shed tears. Sitting on the last bit of Indian rock at Cape Comorin he received the light of inspiration for the regeneration of his motherland. Though a Sannyasin, it was not for him to lose himself in the bliss of Samadhi. His Guru had one day scorned him for this selfish desire of his by saying: "Naren, I thought you were made of better stuff." In his last days, Sri Ramakrishna, unable even to speak, wrote on a piece of paper. "Naren will teach others." Narendra protested, but the Master replied: "You shall do it." He then told others: "The time will come when he (Narendra) will shake the world to its foundations through the strength of his intellectual and spiritual powers."

He now understood the deeper significance of his Master's words. He must act. He must preach religion to the world and vow to allay the sufferings of the poverty-stricken, ill-clad, ill-fed, illiterate people of his country. If need be, he would go to the West in the name of India's millions. But he wanted to know whether he had his Master's sanction. When he returned to Madras and found his disciples urging him to carry out his intention of going to the West, he prayed to him for guidance, and awaited a direct command. Several nights later, as he lay half-asleep, the command came to him in a symbolic dream. He saw the figure of Sri Ramakrishna walking from the seashore into the waters of the ocean and beckoning him to follow. He awoke with joy and wrote to the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, for her permission and her blessings, both of which she gladly gave.

In 1893, he left his country to participate in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. He was unknown and had no official credentials, but he had faith in the Divine Command that was animating him. Even before embarking for America, he said to his brother disciple, Swami Turiyananda, "The Parliament of Religions is being organized for this (pointing to himself). My mind tells me so. You will see it verified at no distant date."

And so did it prove to be! The World's Parliament of Religions was described as "a unique phenomenon in the history of religions. Never before had the representatives of the world's great religions been brought together in one place, where they might without fear tell of their respective beliefs to thousands of people. It was an unparalleled meeting, and, when first proposed in that day of intolerance and materialism, it seemed to many impossible of human achievement."

But the impossible was made possible. Eye-witnesses recorded that Swami Vivekananda stole the whole show by his personality and his message delivered in the name of the 'Mother of Religions'.

In the land of abundance and comfort, he spoke of renunciation as the only path to immortality; in the land of intolerance, he proudly declared that he came from a land which not only believed in universal toleration, but accepted all religions as true.



Swami Vivekananda

Men and women of all ages rallied round him to help him in his work. They had seen a man in whom spiritual truths were fully realized and who spoke with authority. In a short time his work took root and Vedanta Societies were formed in various states of America. Needless to say that all his work had to be done in the face of opposition and criticism, especially from the Christian missionaries.

After two years' stay in America, he turned his thoughts towards Europe. Miss Henrietta Muller and Mr. E. T. Sturdy had invited him to London. Miss Muller had heard him speak in America and ever since had great admiration for him. Mr. Sturdy had admiration and love for India. He had spent some years in Almora in India, performing austerities. So both were very keen that the Swami should come to London.

The Swami gladly accepted the invitation. He was overworked and tired and friends agreed that a long sea-voyage would give him the rest he needed. Mr. Leggett, a friend of his, had invited him to visit Europe in order to be present at his marriage which was to take place in Paris, so in 1895, the Swami left New York with Mr. Leggett.

On September 10, he left for London where he was received by friends, amongst whom were Mr. Sturdy and Miss Muller. He began his work within a few days by means of private interviews and drawing-room meetings. Lady Isabel Margesson and others of the aristocracy met him frequently.

His friends arranged that he should deliver a lecture at the Princes' Hall on October 22, and both the public and the press gave him a hearty welcome. In a few days the 'Hindu Yogi' became not only well-known, but the most interesting figure in society. It seems, however, that Margaret did not meet him then, for, as she records in her book, *The Master As I Saw Him*, it was only in November that she first saw him.

5. *The Meeting*

IT WAS AT THE HOME of Lady Isabel Margesson that Margaret met Swami Vivekananda for the first time. It was a cold Sunday afternoon in November and there were only fifteen or sixteen people sitting in a semi-circle, while the Swami sat facing them in his ochre robe and girdle, with the glowing hearth behind him. He exclaimed now and again, 'Shiva! Shiva!'

The gentleness and loftiness in his eyes reminded Margaret of Raphael's Sistine Child, and his chanting of Sanskrit verses recalled to her the Gregorian music of the churches. The Swami sat there till late in the evening—a Hindu sage among a group of Western listeners talking about the perennial Truths of his Eternal Religion! In a West-end drawing-room in London the atmosphere that was created was that of an Indian village, where, as twilight passes into darkness, groups of people sit listening to a Sadhu beside a well or under a tree.

The Swami said he had come because he believed that the time had arrived when nations should exchange ideas, even as they were already exchanging the commodities of the market.

He talked to them about God and the three paths of spiritual progress—Action, Knowledge and Devotion; of Pantheism, Monotheism and Monism; about Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity.

There was enough to enthral the attention of the listeners, but the guests who had been invited were not particularly inclined to accept his views Most of them were interested in the modern movement which regarded psychology as the centre of faith. They were intellectually advanced, but were unable to comprehend the spirit of a strange and bold doctrine of Truth. Committed to their own ideas, with insular pride and indifference they gave their verdict to their hostess, as they left one by one, "It was not new"

But the following week, as Margaret went about her tasks, it dawned on her that it was not only ungenerous but unjust, to dismiss in such fashion the message of a new mind and a strange culture. A votary of Truth should have an open mind and be above prejudices. She could not deny that she had seen some truths directly and had been impressed by the loftiness of others. For instance, when the Swami talked of Divine Incarnation and quoted the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Whenever Dharma decays and Adharma prevails, then I manifest myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil, for the firm establishment of Dharma, I am born again and again," she could not but be impressed by the greatness of that idea. She understood why the Swami said all religions are true and asked them not to criticize any of the Divine Incarnations. She could not fully understand his assertion that freedom of the soul and not merely service to humanity was the goal of life; but she was awed and touched by the beauty of the thought that though God was really Impersonal, when seen through the mists of sense He became Personal. Religion as a matter of 'realization' and not mere 'faith' was a new thought that needed consideration. But above all these, it was the personality of the speaker that so impressed her. He spoke with a sense of conviction born out of a realization which even an unbeliever could not deny.

As fragments of what the Swami had said came back to her she became less rigid mentally and decided to understand him better. She attended two more of his lectures, which were delivered on the 16th and 23rd of November, but her attitude was still that of a sceptic. In the question classes she was always ready with a 'but' and a 'why' on her lips. The fact was, she was unwilling to accept *in toto* what the Swami said for fear of either transcending or rejecting it afterwards. Years later, when one of Margaret's friends teased her on the ground that her own faith in the Swami was greater than hers because she could accept all the statements he made, the Swami said gently to Margaret: "Let none regret that they were difficult to convince! I fought my Master for six long years, with the result that I know every inch of the way! Every inch of the way!"

The time came, however, before the Swami left England,

when Margaret addressed him as 'Master'. She wrote:

> I had recognised the heroic fibre of the man, and desired to make myself the servant of his love for his own people. But it was his *character* to which I had thus done obeisance. As a religious teacher, I saw that although he had a system of thought to offer, nothing in that system would claim him for a moment, if he found that truth led elsewhere. And to the extent that this recognition implies, I became his disciple. For the rest, I studied his teaching sufficiently to become convinced of its coherence, but never, till I had had experiences that authenticated them, did I inwardly cast in my lot with the final justification of the things he came to say. Nor did I at that time, though deeply attracted by his personality, dream of the immense distance which I was afterwards to see, as between his development and that of any other thinker or man of genius whom I could name.

When the Swami left for America that winter, she kept pondering over these three things concerning him. First, the breadth of his religious culture; second, the great intellectual newness and interest of the thought he had brought to them; and thirdly, the fact that his call was sounded in the name of that which was most lofty and pure and had no touch of the baser elements in man.

With other friends, she eagerly awaited her Master's return to London.

6. *The Second Visit*

Swami Vivekananda left New York on April 15, 1896, to return to London. Friends and admirers were happy to find him in their midst again. He was happy, too. Swami Saradananda had already arrived from India and it was after a lapse of years that the brother disciples met in Mr. Sturdy's house at St. George's Road.

This time Swami Vivekananda immediately plunged into work. He started classes on Jnana Yoga at the beginning of May and towards the end of the month he delivered three lectures at the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours in Piccadilly. These lectures were very popular. Therefore, another series was arranged for Sunday afternoons in the Princes' Hall, from the end of June to the middle of July.

Besides these public lectures, the Swami regularly held five classes a week and on Fridays a question-answer class. His drawing-room talks and lectures in well-known clubs also continued. Of numerous talks, mention may be made of one at Mrs. Annie Besant's lodge on 'Bhakti', one at the residence of Mrs. Hunt at Notting Hill Gate and one at the Sesame Club on 'Education'.

The subject of these lectures and talks varied and it was by good fortune that at this time the services of Mr. Goodwin were made available as a stenographer, for it is due to his labours that most of the lectures have been preserved. Mr. Goodwin was so enlightened by the constant company of the Swami that he left his work, broke all ties with his home and remained devoted to his Master's work till the end of his life.

Margaret and some of her friends were among those who regularly attended the Swami's lectures. With open minds they were ready to receive the truth of his Vedantic preachings. Each of them tried to comprehend the meaning of what he taught according to his or her experience and conception of religion.

Margaret summed up very beautifully their impressions in a report which was published in September 1897, in the *Brahmavadin:*

> To one, the very conception of a religion which preached universal tolerance—which held that we proceed from truth to truth, and not from error to truth—was enough. .. To another, deeply versed in our modern literature and especially in Poetry, with its ever recurring flashes of supreme intuition—it was the Swami's I AM GOD that came as something always known, only never said before. Others there were who have been vaguely troubled by the anthropomorphism of our Christian doctrine of the Fatherhood of God, and these found in Bhakti-Yoga that such a conception was not final, but only one of the series passing by degrees into that sense of Divine Union . . Yet again, it was the Unity of Man that was the touch needed to rationalise all previous experiences and give logical sanction to the thirst for absolute service never boldly avowed in the past. Some by one gate, and some by another, we have all entered into a great heritage, and we know it

The Swami's greatest intellectual achievement during this visit consisted in his lectures on the Hindu theory of Maya. He did not interpret 'Maya' as 'delusion' According to him Maya is a simple statement of facts—what we are, and what we see around us. To break through it is Freedom, Mukti. Man has not to be a slave of Nature. "Not the soul for Nature, but Nature for the Soul"—such bold assertions of Vedānta stirred the minds of the learners.

One day during the question-class, the Swami suddenly rose and thundered: "What the world wants to-day, is twenty men and women who can dare to stand in the street yonder, and say that they possess nothing but God. Who will go?" And once again, "Why should one fear? If this is true, what else could matter? *If it is not true, what do our lives matter?*"

In these words the Master was, as it were, summing up all the truths he himself had come to teach, and they evoked a response in Margaret's heart. She was inflamed with a desire

to follow his lead. But just then she did not know how and what she should do. She wrote to the Swami to find out from him his plan of work. The reply came immediately:

63, St. George's Road, London,
7th June, 1896.

Dear Miss Noble,

My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

This world is in chains of superstition. I pity the oppressed, whether man or woman, and I pity more the oppressors.

One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by *ignorance* and nothing else. Who will give the world light? Sacrifice in the past has been the Law, it will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many, for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundred are necessary with eternal love and pity.

Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.

It is no superstition with you, I am sure, you have the making in you of a world-mover, and others will also come. Bold words and bolder deeds are what we want. Awake, awake, great one! The world is burning with misery. Can you sleep? Let us call and call till the sleeping gods awake, till the god within answers to the call. What more is in life? What greater work? The details come to me as I go. I never make plans. Plans grow and work themselves. I only say, awake, awake!

May all blessings attend you for ever!

Yours affectionately,
Vivekananda.

There was no direction to work given in the letter. Margaret understood that the Swami had taken her offer of services seriously, but she had to wait for a more direct hint. One day, during a conversation, the Swami turned to her and said: "I have plans for the women of my own country in which you, I think, could be of great help to me," and it was then she knew that she had heard a call that would change her life. For years she had waited for some light to dispel the darkness that was obscuring her progress. She now saw a ray of light and hopefully desired to follow it. Years later, after the publication of her book, *The Web of Indian Life*, she wrote to a friend:

> Suppose Swami had not come to London that time! Life would have been like a headless torso. For I always knew that I was waiting for something, I always said that a call would come, and it did. But if I had known more of life, I should, perhaps, have doubted whether when the time came I should certainly recognize. Fortunately, I knew little and was spared the torture. Now I look at the book and say: "If he had not come!" For always I had this burning voice within, but nothing to utter. How often and often I have sat down, pen in hand, to speak, and there was no speech, and now there is no end to it! As surely as I am fitted for my world, so surely is my world in need of me, waiting, ready.

During the summer, the Swami went with his friends, the Seviers and Miss Muller, to Switzerland. On his way back, he visited Prof. Paul Deussen in Kiel, saw part of Germany and returned to England by September. He stayed first with the Seviers at Hampstead and then at Miss Muller's residence in Ridgeway Gardens.

The Swami was now eager to return to India The Seviers had already decided to go with him in order to help in starting the Advaita Ashrama in the Himalayas. His faithful Goodwin was also going with him. Miss Muller and one Miss Bell, decided to follow later.

Margaret was prepared to go, but had not yet told the Swami about it. One evening, when Miss Muller told him

of her willingness to join him in India for his work, the Swami was surprised, but said quietly: "For my own part I will be incarnated two hundred times, if that is necessary, to do this work amongst my people, that I have undertaken."

December 16 was fixed for his departure. On Sunday, December 13, at the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours in Piccadilly, a farewell gathering was held. In the beautifully-worded report of Mr. Eric Hammond: "Speeches illustrating the esteem and affection which Swamiji had won, were made by men and by women. Salvoes of applause punctuated and followed them. Many were silent, tongue-tied and sad at heart. Tears were very near to some eyes. Grey and gloom without were intensified and deepened by grey and gloom within. One form, one figure, fought and triumphed over sorrow; arrayed in garments, glistening as of amber, Swamiji passed among the people, like a living shaft of sunshine. 'Yes, yes,' he said, 'we shall meet again; we *shall*!'"

7. *The Ramakrishna Math & Mission*

Swami Abhedananda reached London before the Swami left He took charge of the work in London while Swami Saradananda went to America. Mr. Sturdy was the most active Vedanta worker in London and in Margaret he found a good collaborator.

The Swami reached Colombo on January 15, 1897, and from there proceeded to Pamban. He was given a tremendous home-coming welcome in the major cities of South India. On February 20, he reached Calcutta, where the joy and pride of his brother disciples at the Alambazar Monastery knew no bounds. They were not aware of the fact that the hero of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago was their beloved Narendra, till a letter from him reached them six months later. Now they were happy to recall the prophetic words of their Master: "Naren will shake the world to its foundations."

After triumphal marches and meetings at various places, when he had settled down peacefully in Calcutta, he gave thought to the founding of an organization. As his task had spread in the West, it had become clear to him day by day, that it was not sufficient to influence the spirit only, but that an organization was necessary to stabilize the work. For this purpose all his hopes centred in the small Brotherhood at the Alambazar Monastery, formed under the banner of Sri Ramakrishna.

As early as 1895, he wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda about the need of forming an organization Again in another letter to his brother disciples, written from England in 1896, he wrote in greater detail about the organization, mentioning in general even its aims and objects.

Here a distinction may be made between the monastic Order of Sri Ramakrishna and the new organization of which the Swami was thinking. The seed of the monastic Order

had been sown by Sri Ramakrishna himself in those early days at Cossipore, when the Swami, then Narendranath, and his brother disciples, were immersed in austerities in the Cossipore garden-house. One day, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna brought Gerua clothes and Rudraksha beads to Sri Ramakrishna to be distributed amongst some good Sadhus. The Master then pointed out to him his own young disciples and said: "Here are boys full of renunciation. You won't be able to find better monks anywhere. Distribute the clothes and beads among them." On that blessed day was laid the foundation of a monastic Order which later on was to grow and develop into the mighty Ramakrishna Order.

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, this band of disciples took the formal vows and habit of Sannyasa and formed themselves into a brotherhood. First they stayed at Baranagore and then at Alambazar. The Swami now appealed to this brotherhood to accept his interpretation of Sannyasa and create a new order of Sannyasins in India who would dedicate their lives to the service of their fellowmen.

It was not easy, however, for the Swami to convert his brother disciples to this view. Until now they had been leading austere, meditative lives, according to their own inclinations, keeping aloof from the world, its cares and sorrows. They were not convinced as to the ideas of a rational religion and social service nor were they prepared to give up their quiet way of life. Ultimately, their deep love for the Swami and their faith in his leadership made them accept his views. The Swami's biographers rightly say that, of the numerous triumphs of the Swami, one of the greatest was the conversion of his brother monks to the new mission of life.

The Swami thought of forming an Association with the active help and co-operation of these Sannyasins and a representative section of the public. Accordingly, on May 1, 1897, he called a meeting of the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at the house of Sri Balaram Bose at 57 Ramkanto Bose Street, Baghbazar, Calcutta. In his opening speech, he said:

> This Association will bear the name of him in whose name we have become Sannyasins, taking whom as your

> ideal you are leading the life of householders in the field of activity of this Samsara, and whose holy name and the influence of whose unique life and teachings have, within twelve years of his passing away, spread in such an unthought-of way, both in the East and the West. Let this Sangha, organisation, be therefore named the Ramakrishna Mission. We are only the servants of the Master. May you all help us in this work.

Thus the Ramakrishna Mission started in India and workers and friends in foreign lands were kept informed about its work.

8: *Summons*

AMONG THE MANY PROBLEMS which arrested the Swami's attention was that of women. He often voiced his sentiments by saying that a nation cannot rise if one of its limbs is paralysed, just as a bird cannot fly with only one wing. He wrote to Mrs. Bull on February 25, 1897, "My duty would not be complete if I die without starting two places, one for the Sannyasins, the other for the women."

Mrs. Bull offered him financial help for starting a monastery, but he refused her offer as there were as yet no definite plans. He was not worried about money: it would be forthcoming when the work was once started. But where were the women to undertake this tremendous task? Only educated ladies could help him. He had heard of Sarala Ghoshal, who was the editor of *Bharati*, and he had great hopes of her. In two letters, written to her on April 6 and 24, 1897, the Swami said: "May the Lord grant that women like you be born in this country, and devote their lives to the betterment of their motherland!"

In moving words he spoke of India's miserable plight, the poverty and ignorance of her children, and that women of enlightenment alone could raise them from their degradation.

> Education, education, education alone! Travelling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people, there was brought to my mind the state of our own poor people and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer, I got.... It will be necessary to start centres for women exactly like those for men. But you are aware how difficult that is in this country.... The money required for this work would have to come from the West. And for that reason our religion should be preached in Europe and America. ..If bold

> and talented women like yourself, versed in Vedanta, go to England to preach, I am sure that every year hundreds of men and women will become blessed by adopting the religion of the land of Bharata....If someone like you goes, England will be stirred, not to speak of America! If an Indian woman in Indian dress were to preach the religion which fell from the lips of the Rishis of India—I see a prophetic vision—there will rise a great wave which will inundate the whole Western World. Will there be no woman in the land of Maitreyi, Khanna, Lilavati, Savitri and Ubhayabharati, who will venture to do this?

This fervent appeal of the Swami did not touch the heart of any woman in India. But in a far-off land the light of its inspiration broke upon the soul of Margaret Noble.

The Swami knew that Margaret was serious and sincere, and that she desired to dedicate her life to the service of the Indian women, so in practically all his letters he gave her news about the progress of work in India. Four days after the meeting of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna mentioned above, he wrote to her about it, ending with the words:

> So far about work. Now about you personally. Such love and faith and devotion and appreciation like yours, dear Miss Noble, repays a hundred times over any amount of labour one undergoes in this life. May all blessings be yours.

He spoke to her about the kind of work she would have to do and the conditions in which she would have to work. Again on June 20, 1897, he wrote:

> Let me tell you plainly. Every word you write I value, and every letter is welcome a hundred times. Write whenever you have a mind, and opportunity, and whatever you like, knowing that nothing will be misinterpreted, nothing unappreciated. I have not had any news of the work for so long. Can you tell me anything? I do not expect any help from India, in spite of all the jubilating over me. They are so poor!...

> A number of boys are already in training, but the recent earthquake has destroyed the poor shelter we had to work in, which was only rented, anyway. Never mind. The work must be done without shelter, and under difficulties....As yet it is shaven heads, rags and casual meals. This must change, however, and will, for are we not working for it, head and heart?

Swami Brahmananda was the President of the Ramakrishna Mission and it was he who sent reports of the work being done in India to foreign centres. Margaret wrote a long letter to him asking questions regarding the Mission work. She wanted to report on the India work to the Vedanta Centre in London. The Swami gave a detailed reply to her questions in writing and sent it to Swami Brahmananda, who replied to her on the same lines.

In London Margaret helped Swami Abhedananda to carry on the Vedanta work and she started a Vedanta Centre in Wimbledon. Swami Abhedananda conducted classes in different private houses, which were followed by animated discussions. Mr. Sturdy always presided over the lectures and helped to elucidate points raised. Meanwhile, Margaret reported the work done in London from time to time in the *Brahmavadin*.

For the summer of 1897, the classes were closed. Margaret wrote in the *Brahmavadin* for September 1897:

> It does not follow, however, that Vedanta is dead or even asleep amongst us. Some of us regard these breathing periods as the most valuable influence of all, in extending the sphere of conviction. The thoughts that Vedantic teaching brings, to a mind hearing it for the first time, are too vast and too new in kind for speedy assimilation. There must be rest and solitude, and fate has ordained that instead of our going away into the wilderness to find these, our interpreters shall go away from us and leave us to fight with our ignorance alone.

The classes were to restart after the summer, but in October, Swami Abhedananda left for America and the London and Wimbeldon Centres were disbanded. However, because of

the enthusiasm of Margaret, Mr. Eric Hammond and Mrs. Ashton, the work continued in an informal way. London members held gatherings at friends' houses, read papers on Vedanta and had discussions. At such gatherings, Margaret read the reports of Indian work.

After receiving Swami Brahmananda's report, the first of these meetings was held. Margaret said:

> One feature which will be of vast interest to our first gathering is a report of the Math Brotherhood and its work, which has been sent to us from Baranagore by the Swami Brahmananda. This document will also be printed and distributed amongst all friends known to us in this country and America, and anyone else who desires to see it has only to send for a copy. In this interesting and exhaustive statement, all who have read it feel that we take an important step towards true realisation of our solidarity with our Indian brethren. The Ramakrishna Mission is an idea that appeals to us particularly, not only for the honour of the Saint after whom it is named, and whom many of us in England have learned to love —but also because its aims and methods are congenial to our own. This and the Alambazar Famine Relief are a splendid vindication of the spiritual life from the charge of passivity so often preferred against it by the materialistic West.

And again in another report she wrote:

> Great interest was expressed in the work of famine relief and in the Ramakrishna Mission. These are developments which appeal to the West in a peculiar way, and it may be hoped that eventually the English centres will do their share towards sending out those secular and spiritual educators who shall carry on Hindu work on Hindu lines as some slight acknowledgment of the great benefits conferred on themselves by the awakening missionary zeal of India.

These reports were published in the October and November

issues of the *Brahmavadin* and spoke of Margaret's interest in the newly-established Ramakrishna Mission.

But with all this work on hand, Margaret's thoughts were always concerned with coming to India. She had gradually wound up her responsibilities there and was waiting for the Swami's instructions to join him. But in none of his letters did the Swami speak of her future work and plans, nor did he ask her to come to India. Of course he was full of praises for her work in London.

> I entirely agree with the prospectus of your Society, and you may take for granted my agreement with everything you will do in the future. I have entire faith in your ability and sympathy. I already owe you an immense debt and you are laying me every day under infinite obligations. My only consolation is that it is for the good of others. Else, I do not deserve in the least the wonderful kindness shown to me by the Wimbledon friends. You good, steady, genuine English people, may the Lord always bless you. I appreciate you every day more and more from a distance.

In his next letter written on July 23, 1897, he asked her to stay in England and work for him, instead of coming to India.

> The work has already begun and at present famine-relief is the thing next to hand. Several cnetres have been opened and the work goes on....From the next week a monthly report of the whole work will be forwarded to you if it has not already reached you....You can do more work for us from England than by coming here. Lord bless you for your great self-sacrifice for the poor Indians.

Margaret was terribly disappointed. She was not the person to do things by halves. Since the day she had heard from the Swami that he had plans for the women of his country and that she could be of great help to him, she had resolved to leave everything and follow him to India. She did not know details of the plans then, but all these days she was eagerly

awaiting news from the Swami about them. Now, instead, he asked her to stay in England and to work there.

Two considerations seem to have weighed with the Swami against Margaret's determination to come to India First, the climate and the difficult living conditions. The Swami had travelled extensively and had first-hand knowledge of the living ways of foreigners. He felt a heavy responsibility, therefore, in inviting Margaret to a tropical country which might not suit her.

Secondly, he had his own ideas about Western people working in India. He would not tolerate his workers regarding his mission as an adventure, nor did he want them to come to India as visitors or patrons. He felt that a European who was to work on his behalf in India must do so in the the Indian way, for, to his thinking this was the only means by which to arrive at an Indian consciousness that would afterwards permit of a true orientation to the Indian aspects of larger questions. Thus it was that he thought it wise to pause before encouraging a person of Margaret's nature to take the final plunge. Time would show whether she was really eager to adopt a new way of living in a new country.

But Margaret's persistence and her consistent interest in his work, made the Swami change his mind about her. He also heard from her friends, Mr. Sturdy and Miss Muller, how strong was her desire to come to India So he finally welcomed her, pointing out the difficulties she would have to face and warning her about working in collaboration with Miss Muller, the necessity for which will be clear from the letter of July 29, 1897, quoted below:

> A letter from Mr. Sturdy reached me yesterday, informing me that you are determined to come to India and see things with your own eyes. I replied to that yesterday, but what I learnt from Miss Muller about your plans makes this further note necessary, and it is better that it should be direct.
>
> Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman; a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women specially.

India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted.

Yet the difficulties are many. You cannot form any idea of the misery, the superstition, and the slavery that are here. You will be in the midst of a mass of half-naked men and women with quaint ideas of caste and isolation, shunning the white skin through fear or hatred and hated by them intensely. On the other hand, you will be looked upon by the white as a crank and every one of your movements will be watched with suspicion.

Then the climate is fearfully hot; our winter in most places being like your summer, and in the south it is always blazing.

Not one European comfort is to be had in places out of the cities. If in spite of all this you dare venture into the work, you are welcome, a hundred times welcome. As for me, I am nobody here as elsewhere, but what little influence I have, shall be devoted to your service.

You must think well before you plunge in, and after work, if you fail in this or get disgusted, on my part I promise you *I will stand by you unto death* whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it. "The tusks of the elephant come out but never go back"—so are the words of a man never retracted. I promise you that. Again I must give you a bit of warning. You must stand on your own feet and not be under the wings of Miss Muller or anybody else. She is a good lady in her own way, but unfortunately it got into her head, when she was a girl, that she was a born leader and that no other qualifications were necessary to move the world but money! This idea is coming on the surface again and again in spite of herself and you will find it impossible to pull on with her in a few days.

There was yet another point in his attitude towards her on which the Swami wanted to be clear before she came. He

knew that it was Margaret's love and devotion for him that had perpared her mind to make the sacrifice As a real leader it was his right to claim these from his adherents, but at the same time he had to remain impersonal and it was his duty to make her realise that the service to which he called her was not his own, but that of the country and of Truth itself.

So in his letter of October 1, we find him writing to her:

> I see persons giving me almost the whole of their love. But I must not give anyone the whole of mine in return, for that day the work would be ruined. Yet there are some who will look for such a return, not having the breadth of the impersonal view. It is absolutely necessary to the work that I should have the enthusiastic love of as many as possible, while I myself remain entirely impersonal.... A leader must be impersonal. I am sure you understand this. I do not mean that one should be a brute, making use of the devotion of others for his own ends, and laughing in his sleeves meanwhile. What I mean is what I am, intensely personal in my love, but having the power to pluck out my own heart with my own hand, if it becomes necessary, "for the good of many, for the welfare of many", as Buddha said. Madness of love, and yet in it no bondage. Matter changed into spirit by the force of love. Nay, that is the gist of our Vedanta.

Nothing more was to be said. The way was open for Margaret to come to India. She could come when she would. Margaret's heart was set upon coming, so, after receiving the Swami's letter, she told her friends about it at the earliest opportunity. Great regret was felt by those friends at her determination to leave London, but they felt that the loss of her there might be repaid a hundredfold by her usefulness in India.

On an extremely cold and foggy winter morning Margaret left Wimbledon for India, while a large number of friends who assembled at the station bade her farewell and 'God-speed'.

9. *In India*

As THE SHORES of England were left behind, Margaret's thoughts about an uncertain future flitted across her mind like the shadows of passing vapours. She was going to the land of her dreams, but what would it be like?

The *Mombasa* passed Port Said on January 5, Sinai on the 7th, Aden on the 12th and on the 24th morning at 10 a.m., she touched the shore at Madras. The ship lay in the harbour the whole day and at night. Mr. Goodwin came to meet Margaret, who was overwhelmed by his goodness.

The next day at 10 a.m. she left Madras for Calcutta. As Margaret neared her destination, she wrote in her diary, "In spite of infinite kindness—very, very lonely. What Calcutta will feel like I tremble to think"

On January 28, 1898, she landed at Calcutta. The Swami himself was at the docks to receive her, so that her trembling heart was at rest. They drove to a mansion in Chowringhee, where she stayed till Miss Muller arrived from Almora.

During the first few days, she went sight-seeing with English friends, Messrs. MacDonald, Dadson and Arbuthnot. She saw the Eden Gardens, the Botanical Gardens, the Museum and the Fort. On one Sunday she attended the Church services.

But her main interest lay in seeing the 'Hindu quarter', so whenever she was alone she hired a cab and drove through the streets in the northern part of the town.

She cultivated the acquaintance of Indians like Dr. J. C. Bose and his sister Labanyaprabha Bose who conducted a school, the Tagores and Mataji and Sarala Ghoshal. She also visited such educatioual institutions as Miss Bose's school, the Bethune College and Mataji's Pathshala.

The Swami had made arrangements for her to take lessons in Bengali. Meanwhile, on February 8, Swami Saradananda arrived by train from Bombay, where he had landed on

coming from England. With him were Miss Josephine MacLeod and Mrs. Sarah C. Bull.

Margaret had already met Miss MacLeod in London She was a great friend of the Swami and he called her 'Jaya', 'Joe' 'Jojo' or 'Yum' From America she had gone to England to hear his lectures and now she had come to India to help him in every way. On arrival she asked the Swami how she could best help him and the Swami replied, "Love India." This she carried out by serving India and helping the Math in many ways.

Mrs Bull was the widow of the well-known Norwegian violinist, Ole Bull, and the Swami had been her guest in Boston. Because of her age, quiet dignity and steady intellect, the Swami called her 'Dhira Mata' and always addressed her as 'Mother'.

On arrival, these ladies put up at a hotel in Calcutta and met Margaret frequently

In the same month, the Math was transferred from Alambazar to Nilambar Mukherjee's garden-house at Belur. In the mean time negotiations were progressing with regard to the purchase of some adjoining lands with a building on the Ganges, as the permanent abode of the Math. One day the Swami took the two American ladies to see the site. They liked the place very much and expressed their desire to stay in the old building there.

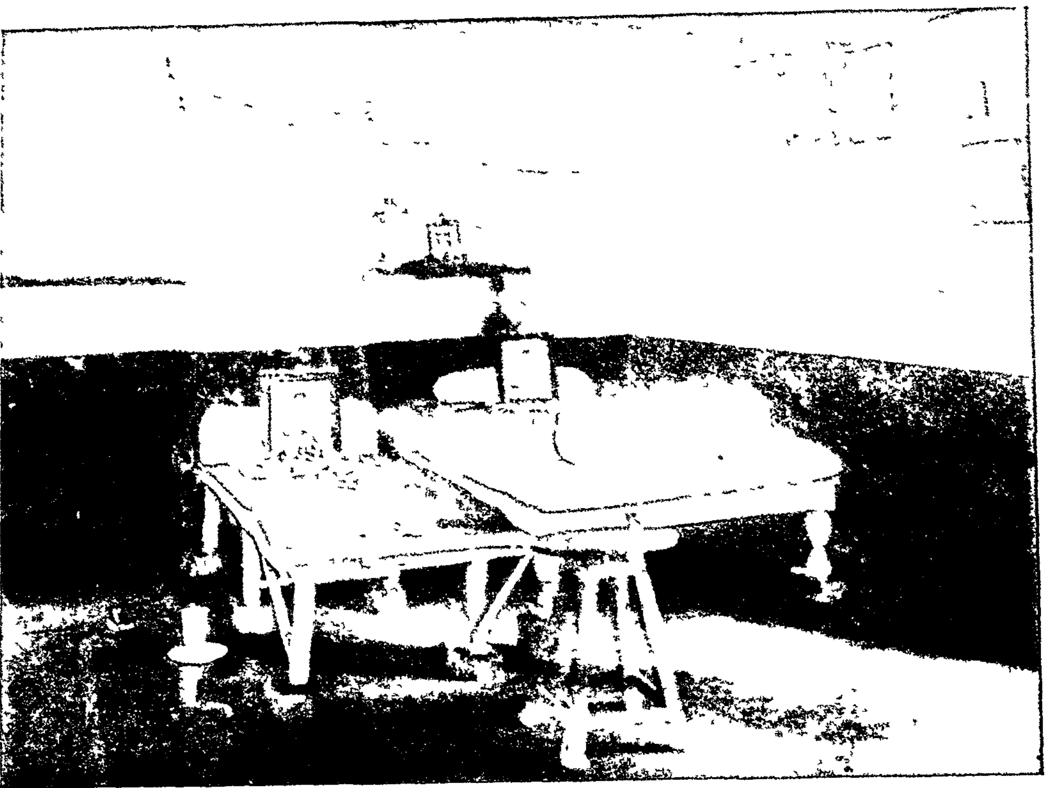
The land was purchased in the first week of March and the house was thereupon repaired and made habitable. When Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod moved into it, they invited Margaret to join them The Swami had said to her. "You will find that little house of Dhira Mata like heaven, for it is all love, from beginning to end" So Margaret went most happily to stay with them on March 17, for six weeks.

During this visit a number of memorable events occurred.

In 1898, Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was observed on February 22, and the public celebration on the 27th of the same month. The celebration was to take place at the temple of Babu Purna Chandra Daw at Bally, but before appearing at the festival, Miss Muller and Margaret planned to visit the temple-garden at Dakshineswar by boat. They wanted to see the place where the Saint in whose name the day was con-



Srı Ramakrıshna Deva



Sri Ramakrishna Deva's Room in Dakshineswar

secrated, had lived, served and prayed. The sight of the interior of the temple was denied to them, for a notice prohibited the entry of non-Hindus, so they went along the terrace towards the Panchavati and sat on the embankment. A learned Bengali gentleman was their guide. Miss Muller was wearing a Sari of the sacred colour of renunciation of the Hindus and as they sat there, a group of people gathered round them to discuss with the Bengali gentleman as to the right of an English lady to wear their robe of renunciation. The argument continued for a full hour, but once the people were convinced of the genuine devotion of the ladies, they opened the doors of Sri Ramakrishna's room for them unasked.

As they entered the *sanctum sanctorum*, they saw that everything was as he had left it when he had last occupied the place. Margaret knelt in silent adoration and shed tears of affectionate devotion.

From the temple grounds they went to the place of celebration and piloted their way towards the Swami with great difficulty through the dense crowds. There was an air of festivity, with merry-go-rounds, swing-boats, music and dancing. At one side, people were being fed by the monks, while on another, the Swami sat surrounded by young people eagerly waiting for him to speak.

Mrs Bull and Miss MacLeod had already arrived and here they were to meet for the first time 'Gopal's Mother', of whom they had heard so much. She was a worshipper of Gopal, the baby Krishna, and had later had the realization that Sri Ramakrishna was her Gopal. Hence, among the devotees of Sri Ramkrishna, this lady, Aghormani Devi, was known as 'Gopaler-Ma' or 'Gopal's Mother'.

They had no language in common, but she took their hands in hers and led them to the ladies in the inner apartments. Margaret and her friends were much touched by the friendliness and pleasure with which they were greeted by these unknown ladies.

> No language was necessary to express the readiness of these Eastern women to meet love lovingly and trustfully half-way. Only, I fancy, in some such fashion as this, can the real genius of the Indian people be gauged.

> Let the occasion be religious, and all barriers be broken down High and low, men and women, kindred and alien, all are one, because all realise so intensely, like Gopal's Mother, the common devotion that has drawn them together.

The second occasion of great interest was Margaret's lecture at the Inaugural Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission held at the Star Theatre on March 11, over which the Swami himself presided. In rising to introduce Margaret he said. "Already England has given us some of her great intellects to help us in our mission ...And now England has sent us another gift in Miss Margaret Noble, from whom we expect much, and without any more words of mine, I introduce to you Miss Noble whom you shall hear immediately."

Referring to the Ramakrishna Mission and wishing it success, Margaret observed:

> I am here to tell you something definite about the work done in England about a year and a half ago in spreading your spiritual thoughts among us. I am not here to give you the details that newspapers have given you. I am not here to lavish personal praise upon one who is present with us here on this platform. But I am here to try in a few words to tell you something of the significance to us in England of the message you sent to us through him.

Then she spoke at length about the spread of Indian spiritual thought in England The speech was thoughtful and well prepared. She ended by saying:

> Yours is the conservatism of a people who have through that long period been able to preserve the greatest spiritual treasures for the World, and it is for this that I have come to India to serve her with our burning passion for service. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Jayati.*

The audience cheered loud and long. Dr. Salzer, a well-known Homeopathic doctor, objected to some references to Christ made by Margaret to which she promptly replied. The Swami was pleased with her speech and said of her

later that she had really come to serve India and not to patronize it. In a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda he wrote: "Miss Noble is really an acquisition."

Another important event took place on March 17. It was St. Patrick's Day and Margaret wrote in her diary, 'A day of days.' For on that day she met Sri Saradamani Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual consort. She had come from her village Jayrambati, and was staying in Calcutta at 10/2 Bosepara Lane.

Margaret had often heard about her. She was wedded at five to Sri Ramakrishna, who was then twenty-one years old. For thirteen years she remained alone in her village-home, forgotten by her God-intoxicated husband. At eighteen, she walked on foot to the Dakshineswar temple-garden in order to meet him. He welcomed her, but asked her whether she desired to drag him down to the mundane way of life. She replied firmly in the negative, saying that she only desired to help him in his spiritual life. "From that time she lived faithfully by his side for many years, in a building in the same garden, at once a nun and wife, and always chief of his disciples."

Margaret had a feeling of subdued excitement when on her way to meet the Holy Mother, as she was called by the devotees. Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod were with her and the Mother greeted each of them affectionately as 'my daughter'. It mattered little that they could not understand each other's language. Then at the request of Miss MacLeod the Holy Mother ate with them.

This may seem too trivial a detail to mention, but in the circumstances it was not. It cannot be explained as an affectionate gesture on the part of the Holy Mother or as an observance of Hindu etiquette. For, eating with foreign ladies professing another religion, was not only inappropriate but even irreligious for a Hindu, especially for a Brahmin, whose daily life was bound by age-old customs and observances. The Holy Mother's partaking of food with the foreign ladies had a deeper implication. It was a sanction given by her to accept and absorb these Western devotees within the folds of Hindu Society.

The significance of the act was not lost upon either the

Swami or his disciple Margaret. Swami Vivekananda wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda: "Sri Mother is here and the European and American ladies went the other day to see her and what do you think, *Mother even ate with them!* Is not that grand?"

And Margaret wrote to her friend, Mrs. Nell Hammond, in London:

> She is the very soul of sweetness, so gentle and loving and as merry as a girl and she has always been terribly orthodox, but all this melted away the instant she saw the first two Westerners. Fruit is always presented by visitors immediately, and this was naturally offered to her, and she, to the surprise of everyone, accepted. This gave us all a dignity, and made my future work possible in a way nothing else could have done.

After the meeting they all returned by boat to the Math. The Swami told Margaret the same day that she would be initiated into the vows of Brahmacharya soon. About this day's experience Margaret wrote later, "The memory of that day makes one of life's great festivals. Never can she forget the fragrance of the Ganges, nor the long talk with the Master, nor the service Jaya had done that morning by winning the most orthodox of Hindu women to eat with her foreign disciples; nor any one of the many happy ties that that day brought into existence and consecrated."

March 25 was another great day for Margaret, for that was the day of consecration. It was Friday, the Christian Feast of the Annunciation. The Swami came to their house in the morning as usual and with him they went to the Math which was then at Nilambar Mukherji's garden-house. The Swami took Margaret to the chapel; and as an opening step in a life time, first taught her to perform the worship of Shiva, and then she was initiated into Brahmacharya and given the name *Nivedita*—the dedicated. At the end she was asked to offer flowers at the feet of Buddha In a voice choked with emotion, the Swami said to her; "Go thou and follow Him, who was born and gave his life for others FIVE HUNDRED TIMES before He attained the vision of the Buddha."

After the service they were taken upstairs. The Swami applied ashes and put on the bone-earrings and matted locks of a Shiva-Yogi and sang and played Indian music on Indian instruments for an hour. That was the happiest of mornings for Margaret—now Nivedita.

Referring to these two important days in her life, on March 17, 1904, she wrote to Miss MacLeod:

> Six years ago this very day, and on a Thursday too, I saw the Holy Mother for the first time, and went home with you again to the cottage. In the cycle of years we have come round to the same days again. Friday next, March 25th, will be the anniversary of the first day I was called 'Nivedita.' We are, then, entering on the seventh year; I wish it might be unflawed, perfect, but this seems too much to ask.

10. *The Cottage on the Ganges*

THE OLD COTTAGE at Belur, beside the Ganges, where the 'Trinity' as the Swami called them, lived, was indeed heaven-like. "Within, an unbroken harmony, and without, everything alike beautiful,—the green stretch of grass, the tall cocoanut palms, the little brown villages in the jungle, and the *nilkantha* that built her nest in a tree-top beside us, on purpose to bring us the blessings of Shiva. In the morning the shadows lay behind the house: but in the afternoons, we could sit in front, worshipping the Ganges herself,—great leonine mother!—and in sight of Dakshineswar."

The Swami came here daily at sunrise, sometimes alone, sometimes with his brother monks. Sitting under the trees, or in the verandah above, he talked to them about various things, the central theme being, of course, India. He followed no sequence—logical or chronological. He chose his subject as he pleased. He not only dwelt on what was good and ideal, but with equal vehemence condemned that which was unhealthy and repelling

He was a brilliant talker. When he spoke of the past, the present was obliterated and the listeners were carried back to the glorious past of India. He spoke of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon; of the great religious teachers; of saints and patriots; of Rajputs, Sikhs and Marathas; of the history of the people; of the geography of the land, of ethnology, sociology, science and metaphysics. But it was always India. "In fact, India herself became, as heard in him, as the last and noblest of the *Puranas*, uttering itself through his lips."

A new aspect of the Swami's personality was revealed to his disciples here. In America and England he was to them a religious teacher wrapped in sunlit serenity and child-like peace. But here he was the lover of his land, the Defender of his Faith, impatient and restless, 'like a lion caught in a net.'

Nivedita wrote:

> There was one thing however, deep in the Master's nature, that he himself never knew how to adjust. This was his love of his country and his resentment of her suffering. Throughout those years in which I saw him almost daily, the thought of India was to him like the air he breathed. True, he was a worker at foundations. He neither used the word 'nationality', nor proclaimed an era of 'nation-making'. 'Man-making', he said, was his own task. But he was born a lover, and the queen of his adoration was his Motherland. Like some delicately poised bell, thrilled and vibrated by every sound that falls upon it, was his heart to all that concerned her. Not a sob was heard within her shores that did not find in him a responsive echo. There was no cry of fear, no tremor of weakness, no shrinking from mortification, that he had not known and understood. He was hard on her sins, unsparing of her want of worldly wisdom, but only because he felt these faults to be his own. And none, on the contrary, was ever so possessed by the vision of her greatness.

Indeed, in spite of the present gloom, the Swami was hoping to see India renascent. He believed that India was not old and feeble, but young and potentially ripe, and at the threshold of great developments.

Here were his Western disciples who were ready to help him in fulfilling his dreams. That is why they must know and love India first. Though he addressed himself to all three, his attention was specially directed towards Nivedita. That was natural. Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod were devoted disciples who were ready to help him financially, but after a time they would go back to their country. Nivedita's case was different. She was a worker. She had left her hearth and home to make this country her own. And she had the distinction of having been initiated and admitted to the monastic Order.

The day that Nivedita was intiated, the Swami took the three disciples in a boat on the Ganges and opened out his

heart, telling them of his anxieties regarding the trust he held from his Master. He had great hopes of Nivedita. Her spirit of service and renunciation marked her out as the right person to carry out his plan of work for Indian women. But he wanted her first of all to know and understand the women for whom she was to work. It was essential that she should learn to look at the world through the eyes of the taught rather than impose her own ideas on them. For this reason the Swami did not hurry her into work.

Four days after Nivedita's initiation, Swami Swarupananda was initiated into Sannyasa and on March 30, the Swami went to Darjeeling. Miss Muller was already there and had invited Nivedita to join her, but on receiving a contrary order from the Swami, she did not go.

In the Swami's absence, his brother monks looked after the guests. "We were accounted by the monastery as a whole, as its guests. So luck and faith would send the hospitable monks, on errands of kindness and service for us. ...And finally, when the Swami Vivekananda himself was absent for some weeks on a journey, his place was always duly taken at the morning tea-table by some one or another who felt responsible for the happiness and entertainment of his guests. In these and a thousand similar ways, we came in touch with those who could reveal to us the shining memory that formed the warp, on which, as woof, were woven all these lives of renunciation."

Thus a sweet relationship sprang up between these Western disciples and the senior members of the Order. Upon Nivedita, who was looked upon as the spiritual daughter of the Swami, they showered their affection without reserve.

While the Swami was at Darjeeling, Nivedita spoke at a prize distribution function at Mataji's 'Mahakali Pathshala'. Swamis Shivananda and Akhandananda were present on this occasion.

Meanwhile, construction work had started on the new premises. On April 7, the Holy Mother visited the Math at Nilambar Mukherjee's house, where she worshipped Sri Ramakrishna. In the evening she came in a boat to the new grounds, and Dhira Mata, Jaya and Nivedita, as the first residents, showed her round.

Plague now broke out in Calcutta, so that by May 3, the Swami returned from Darjeeling and went immediately into action. Pamphlets were written in English by Nivedita and were then translated into Bengali and Hindi requesting the citizens not to be scared or to abandon their homes. Arrangements for nursing were also made. The Swami declared that if money was wanting, he would even go to the length of selling the newly-acquired Math grounds. Of course, the necessity never arose, for his appeal brought funds.

After the plague had been brought under control, the Swami left with a big party for Almora. The party included Swamis Turiyananda, Niranjanananda, Sadananda and Swarupananda, Mrs. Bull, Miss MacLeod, Mrs. Patterson, wife of the American Consul General, and Nivedita.

11. *Wanderings in North India*

THE SWAMI AND PARTY left Howrah station on May 11, at 7-15 p.m. Their first destination was Almora. There they stayed till June 20, and then with the three lady disciples, the Swami went to Kashmir, returning only in October.

For days Nivedita and her friends had been hearing about India and it was now as if the object-lessons had begun. "What scenes were those through which we journeyed from the beginning of May until the end of October! And with what passionate enthusiasm were we introduced one by one to each point of interest, as we reached it! The ignorance of educated Western people about India,. .might almost be described as illiteracy."

In her works, *The Master As I Saw Him* and *Notes on Some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda*, Nivedita has kept a faithful record of this tour. Her historical sense, artistic taste and literary gift have enabled her to reproduce her experiences in all the richness of their details. Thus she has shared with others the great hours of life passed in the company of one as great as the Swami How often is this vast land crossed and re-crossed while travelling, but never a thought is given to the places passed by! But Nivedita was journeying with an ardent lover of his Motherland, who seemed to live and move and have his very being in his country's past. He lived in a high state of exaltation and inspiration and naturally, therefore, those who were with him were infused with his spirit. This journey was to Nivedita a pilgrimage, and in every page of her record we breathe an air of sanctity and reverence

They passed Patna, the Pataliputra of Chandragupta, the Holy Banaras, the industrial Lucknow and the Terai, the birthplace of Buddha—dwelling all the while with the speaker in the historical past of these places.

In her foreword to the *Notes on Some Wanderings*, Nivedita

worte: "Beautiful have been the days of this year. In them the Ideal has become the Real. First in our river-side cottage at Belur, then in the Himalayas, at Nainital and Almora; afterwards wandering here and there through Kashmir;—everywhere have come hours never to be forgotten, words that will echo through our lives for ever."

On the twelfth morning they reached Kathgodam and set out, first in Tongas, then on horseback and by Dandies for Nainital. They were guests at the house of the Swami's disciple, the Maharaja of Khetri.

Late in the afternoon of the 16th, they left Nainital for Almora. Night overtook them as they passed through the forest with torches and lanterns to show the way. In the great silent star-lit night they moved on, at last reaching a dak bungalow by 11-20 p.m. The next day their path had not the colour and fragrance of rose-forests and wild pomegranates and honeysuckles of the previous day. It was bleaker and barer.

When they reached Almora, the Swami and party put up with the Seviers, and the ladies stayed in a bungalow at some distance.

At Almora the Swami followed his routine of visiting the ladies during the breakfast hour and spending the mornings in talk. These talks covered a vast range of subjects. Different races and countries and their respective ideals, philosophies and creeds were all discussed. India was the main subject. Nivedita had the habit of writing down notes on the Swami's talks and then she would think over them. Those notes not only enabled her to understand better, but once the soul of India was revealed to her, with her powerful pen she could interpret it to the world.

12. Conflict Ends

Nivedita had to undergo a severe test before she could discover, love and identify herself with India. She had come to India, for, as she herself had said: "I had recognized the heroic fibre of the man, and desired to make myself the servant of his love for his own people."

The Swami had already made it clear to her that the service for which he had called her was not his own, but of Truth itself. Love and devotion, dedication and service, in this light, bore different meanings. But Nivedita never dreamt that dedicated service implied complete forgetting of one's old self. She was learning to know and like India, but that did not diminish her loyalty towards the English. She was English to the core of her being, proud of her race, its deeds and its history.

After her initiation, the Swami had asked her to what nation she belonged then and to his surprise she had said 'to the English Nation' and had spoken of her passion of loyalty and worship for the English flag, giving to it much of the feeling that an Indian woman would give to her Chosen Deity. The Swami had understood then that his disciple's love for his country was only superficial. He had spoken no more about it. "But with Almora, it seemed as if a going-to-school had commenced"—and it was indeed disagreeable.

Nivedita was not aware of the wrongs the English as the dominant power had done in India. So when the Swami openly and vigorously attacked the English in his morning talks she stood for their defence. As in the London classes, she was the one who argued and protested, and always tried to protect her own judgements and assert her views.

The Swami could not tolerate blindness of half-views and prejudices born out of ignorance. So he pointed out errors in her judgements. For instance, one day while the Swami was praising the Chinese, Nivedita alleged that, as a race, they

were notoriously untruthful. The Swami would not accept this misrepresentation and said that words like untruthfulness and social rigidity were very relative terms. He revealed a new standpoint, and then left the disciple to form her own view. He never dictated an opinion, nor did he call for any confession of faith. But when his disciple could not give an uncoloured judgement, he got impatient and irritated. "Really, patriotism like yours is sin! All that I want you to see is that most people's actions are the expression of self-interest, and you constantly oppose to this the idea that a certain race is all of angels. Ignorance so determined is wickedness!"

Days passed thus in clashes and conflicts and the inner strife increased. The Swami rebuked and attacked Nivedita's cherished deep-rooted preconceptions—literary, social and historical. It was obviously a conflict of two strong personalities. The Swami was not a person to compromise his views or even adopt a gentler method of teaching; Nivedita had not the submissive nature to accept blindly and humbly all that was said. She made efforts to understand, but his words and thoughts were beyond her comprehension and at times she felt bewildered and wrote dejectedly: "Into these morning talks at Almora, a strange new element, painful but salutary to remember, had crept. There appeared to be, on one side, a curious bitterness and distrust, and, on the other, irritation and defiance."

Her depression and suffering were heightened by the fact that she had known the Swami since meeting him in London as a friend and a beloved leader, and had expected him to be ever so. But now his attitude showed indifference, impatience and even silent hostility. The idea of retracting her offer of service never occurred to her; but she knew there would be no personal sweetness left in it. Her trust in him had not diminished to the extent her own self-confidence had wavered. Would she ever be able to pass this test of courage and sincerity? Was her mind really prepared to receive her Master's teachings? Was she really fit to reach the Supreme Goal of life?

With great hopes she had come to Almora. Even before coming to India she had heard about it from her friend Mr. Sturdy, who had spent many days there in austerities. From

this place last year she had received a letter of summons from the Swami. She therefore considered herself fortunate to be in Almora with her Master. And now this illogical suffering!

During this period of depression Swami Swarupananda's company and guidance proved very fruitful to Nivedita. This young monk was appointed her daily teacher in Bengali and Hindu Scriptures. Whenever Nivedita was bewildered by utterly new ideas and feelings of the Swami, she referred to him. His elucidation helped her to understand the atmosphere in which they lived. He formed a sort of link between her Master's mind and her own, and Nivedita was grateful to him for all he did for her. He taught her the *Gita*. From him she learnt to meditate. So greatly was she benefited by the practice of meditation that she said later: "And if it had not been for this help of his, one of the greatest hours of my life would have passed by me."

How the conflict came to an end might be told best in her own words:

> And then a time came when one of the older ladies of our party, thinking perhaps that such intensity of pain inflicted might easily go too far, interceded kindly and gravely with the Swami. He listened silently and went away. At evening, however, he returned, and finding us together in the verandah, he turned to her and said, with the simplicity of a child, "You were right. There must be a change. I am going away into the forests to be alone, and when I come back I shall bring peace." Then he turned and saw that above us the moon was new, and a sudden exaltation came into his voice as he said, "See! the Mohammedans think much of the new moon Let us also with the new moon begin a new life!" As the words ended, he lifted his hands and blessed, with silent depths of blessings, his most rebellious disciple, by this time kneeling before him.. .It was assuredly a moment of wonderful sweetness of reconciliation. But such a moment may heal a wound. It cannot restore an illusion that has been broken into fragments. And I have told its story, only that I may touch upon its sequel.

> Long, long ago, Sri Ramakrishna had told his disciples that the day would come when his beloved 'Noren' would manifest his own great gift of bestowing knowledge with a touch. That evening at Almora, I proved the truth of his prophecy. For alone, in meditation, I found myself gazing deep into an Infinite Good, to the recognition of which no egoistic reasoning had led me. I learnt, too, on the physical plane, the simple everyday reality of the experience related in the Hindu books on religious psychology. And I understood, for the first time, that the greatest teachers may destroy in us a personal relation only in order to bestow the Impersonal Vision in its place.

The next day which was a Wednesday, the Swami went away alone, returning on Saturday. The ladies met him in the Seviers' garden. Sitting near the rose-bushes, under tall Eucalyptus trees, he looked radiant and serene. He had brought peace with him. After meeting him Nivedita returned full of joy and gratitude.

On May 30, the Swami left with the Seviers again for a week. Nivedita and her companions passed their time in reading, drawing and botanising.

After strife and strain, Nivedita entered a period of profound quiet and meditation. "I cannot tell you how real this idea of meditation has grown to me now," she wrote to a friend in London. "One can't talk about it; I suppose, but one can see, and feel it here; and the very air of these mountains, especially in the starlight is heavy with the mystery of peace that I describe to you."

All her irritation had gone, despair gave place to new hopes. Now she understood without effort what the Swami had tried to tell her. She remembered what he had said once during the journey, "Though I often say strange things and angry things, yet remember that in my heart I never seriously mean to preach anything but love!"

Nivedita made attempts to assimilate the Swami's thoughts and live up to them. Her new attitude was echoed in a letter written during that time:

> I am learning a great deal....That there is a certain

> definite quality that may be called spirituality, that it is worth having; that the soul may long for God as the heart for human love; that nothing I have ever called nobility and unselfishness was anything but the most feeble and most sordid of qualities compared to the fierce white light of real selflessness. It is strange that it has taken so long to make me see those elementary truths clearly. And at present I see no more. I cannot yet throw any of my past experience of human life and human relationships overboard. Yet I can see that the saints fight hard to do so; can they be altogether wrong? At present, I am just groping in the dark, asking an opinion here and there and sifting evidence. Some day I hope to have first-hand knowledge, and to give it to others with full security of truth.

The Swami returned on June 5. He was sad at heart for he had received a letter informing him about Pavhari Baba's death. He was the Saint of Ghazipur whom the Swami had revered and loved next to his own Guru.

In his absence, news about Goodwin's death at Ootacamond had been received, but the news was withheld from him on the day of his arrival Next day he was informed of it. The death of his most devoted disciple came as a blow to him, but he remained quiet. Nivedita had written some lines on Goodwin. The Swami rewrote it as we read it now in his poem, *Requiescat in Pace.* It was sent to Goodwin's mother, who acknowledged it later thanking him for his great good influence which helped to build up the fine character of her son.

As days went by, the Swami complained of the weakness that brought Goodwin's image constantly to his mind and he became eager to leave the place. It was decided that with Mrs. Bull, Miss MacLeod and Nivedita, the Swami should leave for Kashmir on June 11.

Before leaving, he received the news about the death of the editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, Sri. B. R. Rajam Iyer. Mr. Sevier took upon himself the responsibility of publishing the monthly from Almora and Swami Swarupananda stayed back to help him in editing the monthly.

On the last day of her stay at Almora, Nivedita took her *Gita* lessons from Swami Swarupananda. Late in the evening, she sat meditating under her favourite Deodar tree, while others attended a tea-party given by the Seviers.

13. The Vale of Kashmir

On Saturday, June 11, the Swami and party left Almora for Kashmir. The rose-forests of Almora were left behind, but the road was full of ferns, primroses and violets. With her keen interest in Botany, Nivedita delighted in looking at these wonders of Nature.

The next day they reached Bhimtal, where they stayed in an out-of-the-way hotel. After two-and-a-half days they reached Kathgodam, crossed the Terai by rail and came to the plains. The change in vegetation was marked now.

They entered the Punjab on the 14th. The Swami was in ecstasy while talking about her people, history and religion. "It was as we passed into the Punjab, however, that we caught our deepest glimpse of the Master's love of his own land," Nivedita wrote.

From Rawalpindi they went to Muree in Tongas. After staying there for three days they set out by the Kohala-Baramulla way to Kashmir. They reached Baramulla on the 20th and thence left for Srinagar in house-boats. Srinagar was to be their headquarters during their wanderings in Kashmir. They engaged three Dungas or house-boats and spent about a month in and about Srinagar.

Nivedita and her friends were in raptures enjoying the loveliness of the vale of Kashmir. But the thing in which they were most interested was the revelation to them of one more aspect of their Master's personality.

They had seen him in the modern world preaching the Hindu religion and talking about highly spiritual matters, but had never heard him talk of his personal experiences. He was always intensely reserved on personal matters. Nivedita had noticed long before in London that "A hot flush and an accession of delicate *hauteur* were his immediate response, even to such merely theoretical questions as appeared to him to demand too intimate a revelation of the personal

experience." But here they witnessed for the first time his deep yearning for God and intense pursuit of the Infinite. Nivedita was a mute witness to the revelation of this side of her Master's life. And in the introductory remarks on her record of these wanderings she wrote:

> But in good sooth it is not of these things that I am attempting, in course of the present pages, to speak. Mine is the broken and faltering witness of one who is fain to tell—not of geography nor of politics, nor yet of the ways and customs of interesting peoples and unknown races, but rather of the glimpses vouchsafed to her of a great religious life of the ancient order, living itself out, amidst the full and torturing consciousness of all the anomalies and perplexities of the Modern Transition.

In this mood, desire for solitude and silence would sweep over the Swami. Society would seem trying for him. And so with a planlessness which was not accidental, he would break away from his little company now and then to be alone. His companions would come to know from the servants that his boat had left its moorings an hour ago, and would not return that day or for many days. They never knew about it. But when he returned from these lonely retreats, radiant and peaceful, they heard with rapture of his spiritual experiences.

But this was not always the case. The Swami often went on small excursions with his party, when as usual, he launched into various topics of discussions. In his talks he dwelt long on the different religious periods, especially the Shaivite and the Buddhist, through which Kashmir had passed.

Of those small excursions, one was to Kshir-Bhavani on June 26, and another on June 29, to Sankaracharya's Hill, also called Takt-i-Suleiman, where stood a temple of Shiva.

One day the Swami planned secretly with Nivedita to celebrate the Fourth of July. The boat was decorated with a crude tailor-made American flag and branches of evergreen. It gave great joy to the American disciples when they stepped on board for tea on that Independence Day! The Swami also composed a poem, *To the Fourth of July*, and

read it out to them. They then went on the Dahl Lake, and saw the Shalimar and Nishat Baghs.

The same evening, Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod left for Gulmarg on some private business. The Swami went with them part of the way. They returned on the 10th. In the mean time, the Swami tried to go to Amarnath, via Sonmarg, but as the route was blocked, he returned on the 15th.

After three or four days, the whole party drifted in house-boats to Islamabad, seeing the relics of ancient temples on the way. They saw the Temple of Pandrenathan on the first day. The Swami was deeply moved at the sight of this memorial of Buddhism. He talked about Buddhism and Hinduism the whole evening and compared Christian rituals with those of Buddhism and Hinduism. After that they visited two temples at Avantipur—the temples of Bijbehara and Martanda—and reached Verinag on July 24.

The same night the Swami talked to Nivedita for the first time about her work and of the great trust he had placed on her. Recalling this occasion, Nivedita wrote:

> July 24th. The darkness of night and the forest, a great pine fire under the trees, two or three tents standing out white in the blackness, the forms and voices of many servants at their fires in the distance, and the Master with three disciples, such is the next picture. . . .the crown of the day came in the hours after dinner, when we were, at long last, alone, and the constant file of visitors and worshippers, with their gifts, had ceased.
>
> Suddenly the Master turned to one member of the party and said, "You never mention your school now, do you sometimes forget it? You see," he went on, "I have much to think of. One day I turn to Madras, and think of the work there. Another day I give all my attention to America or England or Ceylon or Calcutta. Now I am thinking about yours."
>
> At that moment the Master was called away to dine, and not till he came back could the confidence he had invited, be given.
>
> He listened to it all, the deliberate wish for a tentative plan, for smallness of beginnings, and the final inclina-

tion to turn away from the idea of inclusiveness and breadth, and to base the whole of an educational effort on the religious life, and on the worship of Sri Ramakrishna.

"Because you must be sectarian to get that enthusiasm, must you not?" he said. "You will make a sect in order to rise above all sects. Yes I understand".

There would be obvious difficulties. The thing sounded, on this scale, almost impossible, for many reasons. But for the moment the only care need be to will rightly, and if the plan was sound, ways and means would be found to hand, that was sure.

He waited a little when he had heard it all, and then he said, "You ask me to criticise, but that I cannot do. For I regard you as inspired, quite as much inspired as I am. You know that's the difference between other religions and us. Other people believe their founder was inspired, and so do we. But so am I, also, just as much so as he, and you as I, and after you, your girls and their disciples will be. So I shall help you to do what you think best."

Then he turned to Dhira Mata and to Jaya, and spoke of the greatness of the trust that he would leave in the hands of that disciple who should represent the interest of women, when he should go West, of how it would exceed the responsibility of work for men. And he added, turning to the worker of the party, "Yes, you have faith, but you have not that burning enthusiasm that you need. You want to be consumed with energy. Shiva! Shiva!"—and so invoking the blessing of Mahadeva, he said goodnight and left us.

Nivedita thus received her Guru's blessings for the work she proposed to do. The next day the Swami disclosed his intention to visit Amarnath and invited his daughter to go with him to be dedicated to Shiva. She felt doubly blessed. Dhira Mata smilingly gave permission, and half an hour passed in joy and congratulations. It was arranged that the whole party would go up to Pahlgaon, and wait till their return from Amarnath. The next day they left for Bawan on the way to Amarnath.

14. Amarnath

"TWO PLACES in Kashmir are regarded as extremely sacred, one is Kshir-Bhavani, a spring at which the Divine Motherhood is worshipped, and the other Amarnath, a mountain-cave in which there is an ice-emblem of Shiva. And the most notable events of our summer were his pilgrimages to those two shrines"

On the pilgrimage to Amarnath, the party first stopped at Bawan, where they joined the pilgrim-canvas-town, a strange sight to see. At every halting place, with incredible swiftness, a town of tents sprang up for the night and disappeared at break of dawn, leaving behind the ashes of their cooking fires as the only trace of occupation.

There were hundreds of monks of all the Orders, with their Gerua tents, and amongst these, Swami Vivekananda's influence appeared to be magnetic. The more learned of them swarmed about him at every halting place, filling his tent, and remaining absorbed in conversation, throughout the day. In the beginning, some objections were raised regarding the admission of foreign ladies. But soon they realized the strength of his arguments and yielded. The same afternoon the Swami took Nivedita round the camp to distribute alms and thus be blessed by all the Sadhus Since then the Swami's tent and even Nivedita's were always moved to a leading position and the Mussalman Tahsildar and other officers-in-charge stood attention to him. Later the Tahsildar and his friends became disciples of the Swami.

July 29 was the Ekadashi Day The pilgrims camped at Pahlgaon, the first halting stage, and left it next morning early at six o'clock. On the way, Nivedita saw very little of the Swami. He scrupulously observed all rules of conduct and customs of a devout pilgrim. He was imbued with the spirit of the pilgrimage, practising austerities with devotion and ardour, eating one meal a day, seeking solitude and

silence, telling his beads and passing most of the time in meditation.

The second stage was Chandanawara. The path became more and more difficult. Now on the Swami's insistence, Nivedita did her first glacier on foot. After a tremendous climb of some thousands of feet they walked along a narrow path winding through mountains, and lastly made a steep climb of eighteen thousand feet. Next day, they reached Panchtarani, where the five holy streams met. The Swami and other pilgrims took a dip in the ice-cold waters of each stream.

Nivedita did not give up botanising even there She noted down her findings in the diary and collected specimens, sometimes even at the risk of a limb or life. She found seven to eight species of myesotis near Chandanawara and saw the ground covered with edelweiss. In the third stage, she found large blue and white anemones, gentian, saxifrages and a new kind of forget-me-nots with little hairy silver leaves. On the last stretch of land, she found delicate columbines, Michaelmas daisies and wild roses.

August 2 was the great day of Amarnath. The first batch of pilgrims left at two in the morning. The second batch started by the light of the full moon a little later. The path was narrow and dangerous. Then mile after mile they had to walk along the glacier. About nine miles before the cave, ice ceased, and in the flowing river the pilgrims bathed. The Swami had fallen behind. While Nivedita waited for him, he came up, signed her to proceed and then went to the river to bathe.

Half an hour later he entered the vast cave and prostrated before the great ice-Shiva. After a few minutes he got up and left the cave.

"To him, the heavens had opened. He had touched the feet of Shiva. He had had to hold himself tight, he said afterwards, lest he 'should swoon away.' But so great was his physical exhaustion, that a doctor said afterwards that his heart ought to have stopped beating, and had undergone a permanent enlargement instead.... He always said too that the grace of Amarnath had been granted to him there, not to die till he himself should give consent."

It was the great day of Rakhibandhan and once outside the cave the pilgrims tied on each other's wrists the red and yellow threads of sacrament. They rested on stone gravels near the cave for half an hour and then the Swami said: "I have enjoyed it so much! I thought the ice-lingam was Shiva Himself And there were no thievish Brahmins, no trade, nothing wrong. It was all worship. I never enjoyed any religious place so much!"

But Nivedita was disappointed. She had no illuminating vision. She had watched the Swami all the time. Had he wished, she complained, he could have conferred this grace on her. The Swami understood and said affectionately: "You do not now understand. But you have made the pilgrimage, and it will go on working. Causes must bring their effects. You will understand better afterwards. The effects will come."

His words came true. She understood better later and wrote. "As I look back on this wonderful summer, I wonder how I have come to heights so rare. We have been living and breathing in the sunshine of the great religious ideals, all these months, and God has been more real to us than the common men."

The journey down to Pahlgaon was interesting. In Pahlgaon the other ladies joined and the party reached Srinagar on August 8, via Islamabad.



In Kashmir

Miss Macheod   Swami Vivekananda

Mrs Bull   Sister Nivedita

15. Kshir-Bhavani

THE SWAMI had gone a second time to Kashmir at the express invitation of the Maharaja to select a piece of land for the establishment of a math and a Sanskrit college. The Swami was keen on securing a piece of land for the establishment of a math in the lovely valley of Kashmir in the Himalayas because beautiful natural surroundings are conducive to spiritual practices.

There was a beautiful stretch of land by the riverside on which grew three chenars. The Swami had selected that site and the Maharaja had approved of it; the minds of the devotees were naturally drawn towards it. They all pictured it as a centre of work in the future—work which should realize the great idea of 'by the people, for the people, as a joy to the worker and to the served.'

After his return from Amarnath, the Swami remained for long in a meditative mood. His disciples also expressed their desire to practise meditation in silence and solitude. The Swami encouraged them and suggested that they should camp on the prospective Math grounds for some time. He added that it was considered auspicious by the Hindus to have a new homestead blessed by women. So they decided to establish a temporary 'Women's Math' there before the Maharaja acquired it and handed it over to the Swami. But the Swami's wish was not fulfilled. In the middle of September news reached them that his choice was twice vetoed by the then acting Resident, Sir Adalbert Talbot, when it was on the Agenda for the Council.

The Swami was obviously disturbed; but, accepting it as Mother's Will, he felt all was for the best and remained quiet.

The ladies were disappointed. The three of them together with Mrs. Patterson, wife of the American Consul in Calcutta, tried their best to use their influence to secure this piece of land for him, but they failed. The Resident was adamant.

Nivedita felt hurt. She realized for the first time what foreign domination in India meant!

In Almora Nivedita came to know of the racial hatred of the English towards other races, but she hoped still that England and India would come to an understanding. She gave vent to her feelings in a letter dated May 22, 1898, written to Mrs. Hammond from Almora:

> You cannot imagine what race hatred means, living in England. Manliness seems a barrier to nothing. One of the monks has had a warning this morning that the police are watching the Swami through spies. The Swami laughs at it, though I cannot help attaching some importance to it. The Government would be mad to attempt to interfere with him, for it would rouse a country, and I the most loyal English woman who ever breathed in this country (I could not have suspected the depth of my own loyalty till I got here), would be the first to rise up. But let us hope we shall change all this suspicion.

In a letter written a few days later, she said:

> It is the dream of my life to make England and India love each other. To do England justice, I think India is in many ways well and faithfully served by her sons, but not in such a manner as to produce the true emotional response. On the other hand, of course, every nation demands freedom; Italy from Austria, Greece from Turkey, India from England . .

But all her hopes and wishes were smashed to ground after the Kashmir affair. She wrote then to another friend in England. "As for the attitude of the English to the native —oh! you would blush as I do if you could see it all."

Baffled in his object, the Swami turned his mind towards the dark, inscrutable and the painful way of Kali, the Terrible. In some imperceptible way his attention shifted from Shiva to the Divine-Mother of the Universe. The songs of Ramprasad were always on his lips and he felt the presence of Mother wherever he turned He was determined to realize

this Power behind all its manifestations. He experienced anguish and a world-destroying tempest raged within him. While his vision was intense, in a fever of inspiration he wrote down the poem *Kali the Mother* and when he finished, fell down on the ground absorbed in Bhava-Samadhi.

In this mood he left suddenly on September 30 for Kshir-Bhavani, the coloured springs, leaving word that he should not be followed. He passed a week in austerities, offering milk, rice and almonds in the spring daily and worshipping a Brahmin Pandit's daughter as Uma Kumari, the Divine Virgin. The illumination he received there made a deep impression on him. He returned on October 6, and entered the house-boat with his hands raised in benediction. He put marigold garlands which he had offered to the Mother on the heads of his disciples and said, "No more 'Hari OM!' It is all 'Mother' now." He was like a child sitting in its mother's lap. Gone was his fire of talk and action, in its place was the glow of illumination.

The Swami's personality was so transfigured that his disciples stood in silent adoration and awe, not desirous of breaking the spell of his vision. But in a spontaneous expression of feelings Nivedita wrote to her friend as follows

> But I really sat down to tell you more about Swami, and I do not know how to begin....A fortnight ago he went away alone, and it is about eight days since he came back, like one transfigured and inspired. I cannot tell you about it. It is too great for words, my pen would have to learn to whisper. He simply talks like a child of 'the Mother', but his soul and his voice are those of a God. The mingled solemnity and exhilaration of his presence have made me retire to the farthest corner and just worship in silence all the time ... It has just been the manner of one who had seen God and whose eyes, even now, were full of the vision.
>
> To him at this moment 'doing good' seems horrible. Only the 'Mother' does something. "Patriotism is a mistake. Everything is a mistake," he said when he came home. "It is all Mother.... All men are good, only

> we cannot reach all. I am never going to teach any more. Who am I that I should teach anyone?"
>
> Silence and austerity and withdrawal are the keynotes of life to him just now, and the withdrawal is too holy for us to touch. It is as if every moment not spent with 'the Mother' consciously, were so much lost....
>
> And in those last hours yesterday morning, we held our breath and did not dare to stir while he sang to 'the Mother' and talked to us. He is all love now, there is not an impatient word, even for the wrongdoer or the oppressor; it is all peace and self-sacrifice and rapture. "Swamiji is dead and gone," were the last words I heard him say.

The Swami was eager to return to Calcutta. So, as soon as it could be arranged, they left for Baramulla, reaching it on October 11. The next afternoon he left alone for Lahore. All his companions, friends, servants, boat-people, disciples, parents and children, accompanied him to the Tonga on the roadside to bid him good-bye.

Nivedita and her friends stayed back for some days more. With the Swami's departure ended a most fruitful and illuminating chapter of their lives and they realized that in the radiance of all these experiences their future would be passed. Nivedita ended her Foreword to *Notes on Some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda* with the words:

> We have learnt something of the mood in which new faiths are born, and of the Persons who inspire such faiths. For we have been with one who drew all men to him—listening to all, feeling with all, and refusing none. We have known a humility that wiped out all littleness, a renunciation that would die for scorn of oppression and pity of the oppressed, a love that would bless even the oncoming feet of torture and of death. We have joined hands with that woman who washed the feet of the Lord with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. We have lacked, not the occasion, but her passionate unconsciousness of self . .
>
> In the garments of the beggar, despised by the alien,

worshipped by the people, we have seen him; and only the bread of toil, the shelter of cottage-roofs, and the common road across the cornfields seem real enough for the background to his life... Amongst his own, the ignorant loved him as much as scholars and statesmen. The boatmen watched the river, in his absence, for his return, and servants disputed with guests to do him service. And through it all, the veil of playfulness was never dropped. "They played with the Lord," and instinctively they knew it.

To those who have known such hours, life is richer and sweeter, and in the long nights even the wind in the palm trees seems to cry—'Mahadeva! Mahadeva! Mahadeva!'

16. *Baghbazar*

FROM LAHORE the Swami returned to Calcutta on October 18. Mrs. Bull, Miss MacLeod and Nivedita went with Swami Saradananda to Lahore, Delhi, Agra and other places.

Eager to return to Calcutta, Nivedita left the party and reached Calcutta via Banaras on November 1. The Swami was staying at Balaram Bose's house at 57 Ramkanto Bose Street in Baghbazar. Nivedita went straight to him.

The Holy Mother was staying in Calcutta in a house close to Balaram Bose's house. Nivedita was thinking constantly of her work. She wanted to determine where she stood, to know the world in which she was to work and to learn all that would prepare her for commencing her work. Her work would be among women and so she insisted on her being made a guest at the Holy Mother's house. The Swami negotiated with all concerned and a room was spared for her in that house at 10/2 Bosepara Lane, a little to the north of Balaram Bose's house. On the ground floor near the entrance were two rooms. In one of them stayed Swami Yogananda and the other was given to Nivedita.

Little did Nivedita realize the difficulties she created for the Mother by her insistence on staying with her. The Mother's household consisted of a few ladies—some of whom were devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and some were her own relatives. Nivedita instinctively felt that her intrusion was not approved by some of the old orthodox ladies. But she thought it to be a meaningless caste prejudice against foreign ways of living and hoped that some day their ignorance would be removed. Years later, referring to this, she wrote:

> This is one of the occasions on which people look back, feeling that their courage was providentially determined by their ignorance. It is difficult to see how else a necessary solution could have been found. Yet had I deeply

understood, at the time, the degree of social embarrassment which my rashness might have brought, not only upon my innocent hostess, but also on her kindred in their distant village, I could not have acted as I did.

On the Mother's part, however, there was not the least strain or unpleasantness. Nivedita had already found a place in her heart as in her household. For some days she thus stayed with her.

Within a short period, a house was found for her in close neighbourhood, just on the other side of the road towards the east. This was at 16 Bosepara Lane, where the house stands till this day. But even then she spent the afternoons in the Mother's house. During the summer, at the Mother's express command, she stayed there and made it her sleeping quarters. This time she did not stay in a separate room, but shared the simple and cool dormitory of others, with its rows of mats, pillows and nets against the polished bare red floor.

The other senior inmates of the Mother's house were Jogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Lakshmididi and Gopaler Ma. The former two were disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and Lakshmididi was his niece. She was a child-widow. She had histrionic talents and thus was a delightful companion of the elders whom she entertained with singing and acting episodes from Puranic stories She had great spiritual attainments and, when of age, she became a religious teacher and director to many a seeker.

Gopaler-Ma was an octogenarian, and, as the eldest member of the household, commanded great respect. The shock of having a foreigner in the house was soon overcome by her and she did not hesitate afterwards to shower her affections on this 'daughter of Noren' as she called Nivedita.

This was the first opportunity afforded to Nivedita to observe the simple yet intricate workings of a Hindu household A Hindu's life is built upon a thousand and one tiny details. The Swami had taught his disciples not to regard any detail as trivial, though distinction was made between essentials and non-essentials. With this training and her quick penetrating intelligence, in a few days Nivedita began to understand and value the ways of the lives of these simple devoted ladies whose household she shared.

At the head of their little community was of course the Holy Mother whose very presence to them was a consecration. In a reverential tone Nivedita wrote:

> To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new? In her, one sees realised that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of women may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her hesitate, in giving utterance to large and generous judgement, however new or complex might be the question put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer.

In a short time, Nivedita was able to bind herself to the feelings and observances of Hindu etiquette. With the entire household she enjoyed the peace that reigned over it. Each day, long before dawn, they all woke up quietly and sat facing the wall, lost in counting beads and meditation. After sunrise they cleaned the rooms and then took their bath. When the Mother sat in worship the younger members helped in minor jobs such as lighting lamps and arranging flowers and offerings. Even Gopaler-Ma had her share in such work. After a noon-day meal and a restful afternoon, the evening was spent again in prayers and meditation when a great silence fell over the house. Prostrating before Sri Ramakrishna's picture and other images, and touching the feet of the Mother and Gopaler-Ma, all sat outside on the terrace. Whenever Nivedita was fortunate in securing a place near the Mother, she felt blessed.

When Nivedita emerged from the cloistered household of the Mother, the charm was not broken for her. Baghbazar, in the northern part of Calcutta, had its own fascination for Sri Ramakrishna's devotees. On one side stood Balaram Bose's house, the 'Calcutta Citadel' of Sri Ramakrishna, where his disciples repaired for rest. On its east was the huge family mansion of Girish Chandra Ghosh. A little to the north was the Holy Mother's house. And all these houses were encircled

by the Ramkanto Bose Street and the Bosepara Lane, whose very dust was trod upon by Sri Ramakrishna.

The whole locality was charged with a pure, sober, and religious atmosphere. "What a beautiful old world it was in which I spent those months! It moved slowly, to a different rhythm from anything that one had known. It was a world in which a great thought or intense emotion was held as the true achievement, distinguishing the day as no deed could. It was a world in which men in loin-cloths, seated on door-sills in dusty lanes, said things about Shakespeare and Shelley that some of us would go far to hear. It was full of gravity, simplicity, and the solid and enduring reality of great character and will." To live and move about those streets "was like walking in some twilight of gods, where the forms of men and women loomed larger than their wont."

This appreciation speaks of Nivedita's own greatness of character and will. Considering the difference between the Eastern and the Western thought, ideals and ways of life, it was with conscious effort that Nivedita identified herself with this utterly strange and unknown world.

> I look at my Whitman and Wordsworth and the exquisite beauty of the 'Beata Beatrix', and I long to be able to pass from the one psychic atmosphere to the other at will, a transition without which the mere accident of physical presence is worth little. Yet as I utter the wish it is already to some small extent answered, and I have perceived a larger existence than I had conceived before —a certain immense life of Humanity, in which time and distance are alike merged, and where the Eastern and the Western Aryan have become one in their noblest manifestations.

After a week or ten days' stay with the Mother, Nivedita shifted to her own house. It stood in a quiet clean lane, 'charmingly irregular'.

> My home is, in my eyes, charming. With its two courtyards, its limited second story, and its quaintly-terraced roofs, built at five different levels, it is a rambling specimen

> of the true old Hindu style of building. In the whole place there is not an inch of glass; the lower casements are protected by iron, and the upper by wooden bars, and so, while the sunlight outside my little study is softened by mats made of dark green splints, my bed-room is always open to the stars.

In this house Nivedita started her modest life. She had to face many practical difficulties in the beginning to set up the house. Happily she recollected afterwards:

> There were, however, certain practical difficulties in life. It had taken some time, in the first place, to discover a house that could be let to an Englishwoman, and when this was done it was still a few weeks before a Hindu caste-woman could be found who would be my servant She turned up at last, however, in the person of an old, old woman, who called me 'Mother,' and, whom I, at half her age, had to address as 'Daughter' or 'Jhee'. This aged servitor was capable enough of the wholesale floodings of the rooms which constituted house-cleaning, as well of producing boiling water at stated times for the table and the bath. For some reason or other she had determined in my case to perform these acts on condition that I never entered her kitchen or touched her fire or water supply. Yet hot water was not immediately procurable. And the reason? We possessed no cooking stove. I asked the price of this necessary article, and was told six farthings. Armed with which sum, sure enough, my trusty retainer brought home a tile, a lump of clay, and a few thin iron bars, and constructed from these, with the greatest skill, the stove we needed.
>
> It took some days to set and harden, but at last the work was complete. Afternoon tea, prepared under my own roof, was set triumphantly before me, and my ancient 'daughter' squatted on the verandah facing me, with the hot kettle on the stone floor besides her, to see what strange thing might come to pass I poured out a cup of tea and held out the pot to Jhee for more hot water. To my amazement she only gave a sort of grunt

> and disappeared into the inner courtyard. When she came back, a second later, she was dripping with cold water from head to foot. Before touching what I was about to drink she had considered a complete immersion necessary.

Thus in her new home and newer surroundings Nivedita passed her days in peace and quiet joy between November 1898 and June 1899.

17. *A Small Beginning*

THE SWAMI did not hurry Nivedita in her plan of work but gave her ample leisure so that she might equip herself mentally for the task. Now that she was settled in her house, she seriously thought about starting a school as a beginning.

It was clear to her that the school would be only tentative and experimental in the early stages For she did not want to follow any stereotyped method of work. After studying the world in which she was to work, she wanted to evolve an educational method that would be "qualitatively true and universally applicable to the work of modern education of Indian women." She had learnt from the Swami that to teach against the aspirations of the taught is to court ill results instead of good and that new ideals have to be approached through the old, the unfamiliar has to be reached through the familiar. So, Nivedita made honest efforts to make herself familiar with the aims and aspirations of the people amongst whom she lived.

She frequently consulted Swami Brahmananda in this matter. On November 12, the Holy Mother accompanied by a number of lady devotees visited the site of the permanent abode of the Ramakrishna Order at Belur. The same evening a meeting was held at Balaram Bose's house to consider the opening of the school. The Swami, Swamis Brahmananda and Saradananda and others were present. A series of such meetings were held eventually. An eye-witness has recorded an interesting incident at one such meeting. In the hall of Balaram Bose's house an informal meeting of the lay devotees was held Nivedita spoke in English about her proposed school laying stress on giving national education to girls. Mahendranath Gupta (M), Suresh Datta, Harmohan Babu and others were present. No one noticed the Swami's presence behind these gentlemen. When Nivedita stopped speaking, the Swami whispered to the gentlemen to get up and say that they were



The Holy Mother and Sister Nivedita

willing to send their daughters to her school. When no one really stood up—the Swami got up and said, "Well, Miss Noble, this gentleman offers his girl to you," and pointed to Harmohan Babu. On seeing the Swami, Nivedita was very pleased and on hearing his words started clapping her hands like a child.

The next day, Sunday, November 13, which was the auspicious day of Kali Puja, the Mother came and performed the opening ceremony of the school at 16 Bosepara Lane. The Swami, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Saradananda and a few lady devotees were present. At the end, the Mother gave a whispered blessing spoken aloud by Golap-Ma. She prayed that the blessings of the Divine Mother might be upon the school, and the girls it should train be ideal girls. "I cannot imagine a grander omen than her blessing, spoken over the educated Hindu womanhood of the future," Nivedita wrote later.

On Monday, November 14, the school began with a few girls of the neighbourhood attending. A maid servant was appointed to bring the girls to the school. The Swami, Swamis Brahmananda, Virajananda and Sureshwarananda visited it on the first day.

In the middle of November, Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod came to Calcutta and stayed with Nivedita in her house. It was during this stay that Mrs. Bull arranged for a photograph of the Holy Mother to be taken. Shy and modest, the Mother objected, saying it was of no use. But Mrs. Bull repeatedly requested her, saying, "Mother, I wish to take the photo to America and worship it." After great persuasion, the Mother consented. But when the photographer came, the Mother cast down her eyes and went into a trance. That was the first photo taken of the Mother. She regained her natural state after some time and her second photo was then taken, which is now seen worshipped everywhere. A third photo was taken with Nivedita sitting facing her.

Nivedita plunged earnestly into the school work. With a little reading and writing she introduced painting, clay work and sewing. She went into ecstasy over the handwork of the girls and wrote to Mrs. Bull:

> I find the children here have as much artistic power as

> any I ever saw. Their brushwork is wonderfully good considering their chances and their colour is excellent. And how they love sewing and manual occupation, you just cannot imagine.

Before long, she won the hearts of the children who came to her and the confidence of their mothers. The proud, reserved, orthodox women of the neighbourhood found in Nivedita a good friend Full welcome was accorded to her at any time of the day or night and they felt happy if they found a chance of helping her. Their little acts of kindness like sending milk or fruits when necessary, never missed Nivedita's attention. She gratefully acknowledged them The pure, sweet, shy and reticent ladies charmed Nivedita and she always praised them in speech and writing.

Difference in faith or social status was not a bar to Nivedita's selfless love and charity. For instance, one night, as she was preparing for supper, a sound of wailing arose from the courtyard of some poor person's mud hut just opposite her house. She immediately crossed over to their quarters and there saw a girl dying. She sat and watched her till she breathed her last Hours went by and she sat with the crying women comforting them. The mother of the girl fell in a stupor in Nivedita's arms and asked in despair—"Oh! what shall I do? Where is my child now?" And then, to quote her words:

> Filled with a sudden pity, not so much for the bereaved woman as for those to whom the use of some particular language of the Infinite is a question of morality, I leaned forward. "Hush mother," I said. "Your child is with the Great Mother. She is with Kali!" And then, for a moment, with memory stilled, we were enfolded together, Eastern and Western, in the unfathomed depths of consolation of the World-Heart.

18. *The Mission Expands*

ON DECEMBER 9, the installation ceremony of Sri Ramakrishna's picture was celebrated at the Belur Math and the Swami and a few other monks shifted to the new premises. As the Swami felt a great need for a change he left for Vaidyanath on December 19, returning at the end of January 1899. Meanwhile, the Math was finally removed from Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house on January 2, 1899.

The Math was now perfectly organized. The Swami and all his brother disciples gave most of their time to the training of the younger members. Regular classes on the study of scriptures and Western philosophies were taken. Equal emphasis was laid on work and worship. With regular hours of meditation and prayers, daily duties and demands of the Math were taught to be performed with exactness. On the request of the monks, Nivedita gave lessons to Brahmacharis as follows:

Wednesdays — Botany and Drawing
Fridays — Physiology and Sewing

Nivedita often spoke at the weekly meetings of the Ramakrishna Mission at Balaram Bose's house.

Occasionally she gave lectures on subjects like "Education", and "Training in the Concrete", at the Brahmo Samaj and began a teacher's training class on Saturday mornings for her Brahmo friends. Many educated Brahmo ladies attended of whom mention may be made of Suniti Devi and Sucharu Devi, daughters of Keshab Chandra Sen, Indira Devi Chowdhrani and Sarala Devi Ghoshal of the Tagore family, and Labanyaprabha Basu, sister of Dr. J. C. Bose.

An American Missionary School invited her to teach and she gave history lessons there on Thursday evenings for some time.

On February 13, she was invited to speak on "Kali" at the Albert Hall. On February 20, at the Minerva Theatre she gave an inspiring talk on "Young India Movement." The Swami and several other monks attended this lecture. On March 19, the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was held on the Belur Math grounds for the first time and Nivedita spoke on the occasion. On the 28th of the same month she gave another lecture on "Kali Puja" in the holy precincts of the Kalighat Temple.

In the month of March plague broke out and was rife in Nivedita's neighbourhood. A plague committee was formed by the Ramakrishna Mission with Nivedita as the Secretary, Swami Sadananda as the Supervisor and Swamis Shivananda, Nityananda and Atmananda as members.

The plague relief work started from March 31. The eradication of insanitation appeared to be the immediate work. So with the sweeper-boys Swami Sadananda started cleaning the slums of Shambazar, Baghbazar and other neighbouring localities. He had a genius for organizing work. The group of boys loved him and were ever ready to work at his bidding.

On April 5, Nivedita made an appeal through the newspapers for financial aid. The response was good. On April 21, she spoke to the students at the Classic Theatre on "The Plague and the Duty of Students." The Swami also addressed the students in this meeting. As a result, enthusiasm for the work was created and about fifteen students offered themselves as volunteers

Every Sunday, a meeting was held at Balaram Bose's house. Weekly reports of the work done were recorded and further plans were discussed. The whole work was carried on in such an organized way that the District Medical Officer and Chairman were greatly pleased. Dr. Radha Gobinda Kar wrote: "During this calamity the compassionate figure of Sister Nivedita was seen in every slum of the Baghbazar locality. She helped others with money without giving a thought to her own condition. At one time when her own diet consisted only of milk and fruits, she gave up milk to meet the medical expenses of a patient."

With the help of the medical men and some influential officers she once thought of starting an hospital for women,

but gave up the idea later as impracticable. She concentrated on removing the conditions that led to the spread of plague, namely insanitation and ignorance.

Swami Sadananda supervised the work of the sweeper-boys and took upon himself the responsibility of keeping the slums clean. Nivedita inspected all the work done and gave instructions. One day, she started cleaning the lanes herself when there was a shortage of volunteers. The boys of the neighbourhood felt ashamed and ran to help her, promising to keep the lanes clean thenceforth. Handbills giving instructions about the 'dos and don'ts' during the plague were distributed in all the localities. Ignoring the dangers of working amongst the plague-stricken, Nivedita nursed the patients day and night.

Dr. Radha Gobinda Kar, an eye-witness to Sister Nivedita's work, wrote:

> In the year 1899, plague took the form of an epidemic. In the previous year at the indication of an outbreak of plague the panicky people, apprehending terrible consequences, had fled from the city ...This year, the Governor Sir John Woodburn gave assurance that no patient would be forcibly removed from his home.... During that time, one day, when I returned home at noon-time in the month of Chaitra after seeing the patients, I saw an European lady sitting on a dusty chair near the door. She was Sister Nivedita. She had been waiting for me for a long time in order to get some information. That morning I had been to see a plague-stricken patient in a slum in Baghbazar. Sister Nivedita had come to enquire about the arrangements made for the patient and to take upon herself the task of nursing him. I told her that the patient's condition was critical. Having discussed with her the possibilities of hygienic nursing in the slums of the poor people, I asked her to take precautions. When I went to visit the patient again in the afternoon I saw Sister Nivedita sitting with the child in her lap in the damp and weather-beaten hut in that unhealthy locality. Day in and day out, night after night, she remained engaged in nursing the child in

> that hut, having abandoned her own house. When the hut was to be disinfected she took a small ladder and began white-washing the walls herself. Her nursing never slackened even when death was a certainty. After two days, the child lay in Eternal Sleep in the affectionate lap of that merciful lady.

In an article entitled "The Plague" included in her book, *Studies from an Eastern Home*, Nivedita has given a vivid description of the plague and the death of this child. She is silent only about the services rendered by herself.

The plague work continued alongside her school work, and sometimes the strain of the work was too much for her to bear in the depressingly hot climate. "It is so hot and we have been rushing about so over plague that I feel tired out body, soul and spirit, and scarcely know how to write, but I could not lie down for very shame, for the children have begun to troop into school."

Her admirable work is still remembered by those who worked with her or had seen her work, and it will be gratefully cherished for ever.

19. *Kali and Kali-Worship*

Of Nivedita's public lectures, special mention may be made of two lectures on "Kali" and Kali-Worship", for they created quite a stir amongst the educated people.

The lecture on "Kali" at the Albert Hall was fixed for February 13, 1899. Nivedita worked assiduously to collect material on the subject. After preparing the lecture she showed it to the Swami who approved of it. An English woman to speak on Kali was by itself an advertisement!

On the day of the lecture, the hall was crammed to its utmost capacity. Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, Dr. Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya, Sri Satyendramohan Tagore and Sri Brajendranath Gupta also spoke. Some Brahmo friends of hers attended the meeting. Dr. Sarkar spoke against Kali-Worship and criticized Nivedita for preaching about superstitions which they were trying to remove.

Dr. Sarkar's attack on Nivedita aroused another listener who was a devotee of Kali and, amidst tremendous excitement, called him all sorts of names. There was a free fight The chairman was impotent and whenever a crisis arose Nivedita simply had to restore order. She enjoyed the whole fun.

Two or three days later, the Haldars of Kalighat invited Nivedita to speak again on "Kali-Worship" at the Kalighat Temple. Nivedita asked the Swami whether it would be wise on her part to accept the invitation. The Swami asked her to accept it, for, he thought it would be a great blow against exclusiveness.

One day, the Swami said, he himself condemned image-worship and symbolism. The Advaita Philosophy was his doctrine and the Vedas and Upanishads his scriptural authority. After meeting Sri Ramakrishna it took him many long years to understand his Master's words: "Brahman and Shakti are one, even as fire and its heat, even as milk and its whiteness."

"How I used to hate Kali!" he said. "And all Her ways! That was the ground of my six years' fight—that I would not accept Her. But I had to accept Her at last! Ramakrishna Paramahamsa dedicated me to Her and now I believe that She guides me in every little thing I do, and does with me what She will."

Nivedita and others were witness to his experiences at Kshir-Bhavani in Kashmir when he returned saying, "These gods are not merely symbols! They are the forms that the Bhaktas have seen!"

In 1898, the Durga Puja and the Shyama Puja were performed at the Math. Nivedita's school was opened on the Kali Puja day. Gradually by association the conception of Kali had grown in Nivedita's mind and heart and she accepted Her as the vision of Shiva. Even the ritual of sacrifice, which ordinarily even a Hindu abhors, conveyed a meaning to her. "I have found out the culminating point of sacrifice, and wonder if I could express it. It seems that the sacrifice of animals only goes on until the devotee is strong enough to offer himself instead, and then, like the Pelican, he draws his own blood, and buries the feet of the Mother in flowers dipped in it. To me it explains and justifies the whole!"

With this devout feeling Nivedita agreed to speak at the Kalighat. She gathered further material on the subject and consulted the Swami and his other brother disciples on many points of Shakti-worship and prepared answers to the objections raised at the Albert Hall.

The lecture was arranged for Sunday, May 28, at 5 p.m. The Swami asked Nivedita to see that if her European friends attended, they removed their shoes and sat on the floor with the others For in that Presence no exception was to be made.

Nivedita went to the temple at the scheduled time barefooted. The Swami did not attend as he was indisposed. The meeting was held in the hall of the temple where a big crowd of about three thousand had collected. Her speech inspired and moved the listeners by its depth of feeling and thought.

She began solemnly with the words,

> The spot where we are met this evening is the most sacred of all the shrines of Kali. For long ages it has been

> the refuge of pious souls in need, sorrow and thanksgiving, and their last thought in the hour of death, and who shall say to how many of the saints the Mother has revealed Herself just here?....From this place Her voice goes out through the whole world sounding gently at the hour of evening and the time of dawn—"My children, my children, I, even I, am your Mother."

She went on to explain the three forms of the symbol, Durga, Jagaddhatri and Kali. Then, answering all the objections raised against Kali-Worship at the Albert Hall, she ended in a tone of deep devotion:

> It was so easy to say that God is love, and to think our own private happiness proves it. God is love—but when do we learn that? How do we know it? Is it not in moments of anguish in our own lives that the Great Reality is borne in upon us as all Love, all Beauty, all Bliss? This was the paradox so boldly stated in the Kali-image—this paradox of Nature and of the Universe and of the soul of Man—that She who stands there surrounded by all that is terrible to Humanity is nevertheless, the Mother, and all we Her babes.

It was this study of "Kali and Kali-Worship" that enabled her to write later the book *Kali The Mother.* "The Story of Kali" included in it was, however, written in the Christmas of 1898. Nivedita was then staying with Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod at their rented house in Bally. She wrote it in the form of a story for Mrs. Legget's young daughter—

> Baby Darling, What is the very first thing you remember? Is it not lying on mother's lap and looking up into her eyes, and laughing?
>
> Did you ever play hide-and-seek with mother? Mother's eyes shut, and baby was not. She opened them, and there was baby! Then baby's eyes shut, and where was mother? But they opened again, and—oh....
>
> Baby, some people think God is just like that. A great great Mother—so great that all this big world is Her

> baby. God is playing with Her world, and She shuts Her eyes... And what do we call the Mother with Her eyes shut? We call her Kali....And so, wee one, will you remember that the Great Mother Kali is everywhere?

Thus Kali as the mother is always loving, always ready to play with her child.

But Kali is also the Terrible. One day when an image of Kali was brought before Nivedita, she said to the Swami—"Perhaps, Swamiji, Kali is the Vision of Shiva. Is she?" He looked at her for a moment and gently said, "Well! well! Express it in your own way."

And beautifully she described her in "The Vision of Shiva" as follows:

> Her mass of black hair flows behind Her like the wind, or like time, 'the drift and passage of things'. But to the great third eye even time is one, and that one, God. She is blue almost to blackness, like a mighty shadow, and bare like the dread realities of life and death. But for Him there is no shadow. Deep into the heart of that Most Terrible, He looks unshrinking, and in the ecstasy of recognition He calls Her *Mother*. So shall ever be the union of the soul with God.

The Swami called the worship of Kali, the worship of Death. One day Nivedita was engrossed in similar thoughts when she saw a curious dream. She saw that a short real road led up to Kali. But as she got nearer and nearer, Kali went backward, further and further, till She became a lofty black door. It was the end of the path, and beyond lay the Infinite Ocean, and she understood that Kali was Death.

Many were surprised at her devotion to Kali the Terrible Constant meditation on Her had become so natural with Nivedita that till the end of her life she felt the presence of the Power that Kali symbolized The editor of *The Hindu Review* had once been to her house and wrote about his interesting interview with her as follows:

> Once I was sitting with Nivedita in her house in Bose-

para Lane, sipping tea out of her quaint Swadeshi cups. Suddenly the sky was overcast with black scowling clouds as oftentimes happens in our early summer evenings; and there was immediately a marked change in the mood of my hostess. Her face seemed at once to reflect this awfully dynamic mood of Nature. It beamed with a new light, at once awful and lovely. And she sat silent, apparently unconscious for the moment of my presence, looking intently through the window, at the gathering gloom about the earth and the heaven, and listening, like one in a trance, to the rising tumult of the growing storm. And just as there came, in a little while, the first flash of lightning followed by the crash of the first thunder, she cried out with bated breath—"Kali!"

20. *Training of a Western Disciple*

Nivedita's activities for the welfare of the people and the recognition she received as a worker, a speaker and a thinker, did not for a moment make her forget her spiritual aspirations. "Righteousness lies in duty done: holiness requires renunciation," she once wrote, and she earnestly strove to achieve both.

Since her initiation, she was trying hard to live up to the ideals of purity, simplicity and austerity of a Brahmacharini. For days she lived on milk and fruits and slept on bare boards. She denied herself even the luxury of a fan during the hot season. Such was the strength of the spirit of a true monastic in her.

On March 11, she went to the Belur Math to talk to the Swami about the *Prabuddha Bharat*. They talked of the work done during the plague and the Swami praised her for her services. In the course of their conversation, the Swami said: "The history of the world is the history of a few earnest men, and when one man is earnest, the world must just come to his feet. I am *not* going to water down my ideals, I am going to dictate terms."

These fiery words immediately caught Nivedita's imagination. The Swami's organization, after all, was going to be a real monastic Order and not a series of concessions to the feeble-hearted. She then expressed her desire to be 'a member for life'. The Swami agreed to initiate her into Naisthik Brahmacharya as he had on the previous day initiated two novices.

Consequently, on March 25, she was ordained a Naisthik Brahmacharini. Exactly a year before, she had received her first vow and was called 'Nivedita'. Henceforth the Swami held up as a model before his disciple 'an orthodox Hindu Brahmin Brahmacharini'.

During this period, Nivedita mixed freely with all classes of

people, both Indian and European, and as social etiquette demanded, dined with them occasionally. Nivedita noticed that her Brahmo friends had relaxed the rigidity of many social customs that bound the Hindus. This fact always caused the Swami uneasiness. He feared it might bring about a revulsion in her against the extreme simplicity of the Hindu life. He never interfered with her nor used a single word of authority to prevent her from doing things as she liked. Whenever she spoke to him about some new ideas of her 'new friends', he listened with interest.

Only once, however, during their voyage to England, did the Swami fully express his ideal: "You must give up all visiting, and live in strict seclusion. You have to set yourself to Hinduise your thoughts, your needs, your conceptions, and your habits. Your life, internal and external, has to become all that an orthodox Hindu Brahmin Brahmacharini's ought to be. The method will come to you, if only you desire it sufficiently. But *you have to forget your own past, and to cause it to be forgotten. You have to lose even its memory!*"

The Swami was not a reactionary, nor a 'tit-bit reformer'. His desire was to make Hinduism dynamic. He was conscious of the gigantic spirituality of the orthodox and therefore wanted to see that strength finding new application and undreamt-of expression in the new age. "But," as Nivedita wrote, "he never made the mistake of thinking this reconciliation of old and new an easy matter. How to nationalize the modern and modernise the old, so as to make the two one, was a puzzle that occupied much of his time and thought. He rightly saw that only when it had been pieced together, could national education be in a fair way to begin."

He had trust in Nivedita's capacity for working out a solution for this problem. She was to be his 'instrument' in bringing this dream to reality; therefore, patiently and gradually he gave her lengthy instructions on Hindu etiquette just as a religious novice in Europe is customarily given. Restlessness and constant expression of feelings of pain, admiration or surprise were to be curbed. The Swami would impose long periods of restraint on her saying—"Struggle to realise yourself without a trace of emotion."

From mere good-breeding the Swami turned to mental

discipline and then to spiritual severity. His instructions were direct on this point.

> Lay down the rules for your group, and formulate your ideas and put in a little universalism, if there is room for it. But remember that not more than half a dozen people in the whole world are ever at any one time ready for this! There must be room for sects, as well as for rising above sects. You will have to manufacture your own tools. Frame laws, but frame them in such a fashion that when people are ready to do without them, they can burst them asunder. Our originality lies in combining perfect freedom with perfect authority. This can be done, even in monasticism For my own part, I always have an horizon.

As for the glamour of the world, he said in uncompromising terms:

> Mind! No loaves and fishes! No glamour of the world! All this must be cut short. It must be rooted out. It is sentimentality,—the overflow of the senses. It comes to you in colour, sight, sound and associations. Cut it off. Learn to hate it. It is utter poison!

On the one hand, the Swami gradually revealed the ideal before Nivedita, and on the other hand he made efforts to make the Hindu society accept her within its fold. He endeavoured to make the Hindu way of life which she had adopted easier for her by breaking the barriers of rigid social customs.

In those days, one of the most deep-rooted prejudices amongst the Hindus was eating food cooked by others and eating in the company of others. The Swami often criticized this 'don't-touchism' of the Hindus A disciple of the Swami, Sarat Chandra Chakravarty interestingly narrates how he himself, an orthodox Brahmin, was made to eat with Nivedita once, which made him perhaps give up his prejudice about eating with foreigners.

One day the Swami, along with Nivedita, Swami Yogananda and this disciple went to visit the Zoological Gardens

at Alipore. The Superintendent of the Gardens was very pleased to receive them. After going round the gardens he invited them to tea. The Swami drank a little tea and so did Nivedita. The Swami saw that his disciple was unwilling to take sweets of which Nivedita had already partaken. He therefore persisted in requesting him to take something. Feeling embarrassed, he took some sweets. Then the Swami drank a little water and passed it over to his disciple. The disciple had no other alternative but to accept it. On return, the Swami teased his disciple by telling others that he had eaten sweets and had drunk water with Nivedita. He also added that now the disciple had lost his caste and no one would call him a Brahmin. The whole company burst out laughing, the disciple joining in.

The Swami often invited Nivedita to take food with him and at the same time asked his brother disciples and other friends to join them. Sometimes he went with others to Nivedita's house and accepted tea prepared by her. At other times he asked Nivedita to cook something for him. Nivedita would happily prepare some dish for him, but when later she would come to know that the Swami had taken very little of it himself but had distributed it amongst others, she would feel disappointed. She could not understand the Swami's intention then but confessed later, "It was many months before I learnt to understand the deep forethought and kindness with which he—and also the Holy Mother on his behalf —was constantly working to make a place for me, as a foreigner, in Hindu Society."

But, on Nivedita's part, it may be said that due to the influence of her Master's teachings, she never made a grievance of it. On the contrary, she respected the injunctions and prohibitions of orthodoxy and for that earned greater respect herself.

Her one-time colleague and well-known writer, Sarlabala Sarkar wrote in her reminiscences of Nivedita: "When Nivedita went to Dakshineswar, she humbly stood at the gate because she knew that she had no right to enter the temple and see the Goddess. But, alas! I cannot say, how many amongst those who even had the privilege to worship Her, were as worthy as Nivedita! I have observed that when she came to

our houses, she always remained aloof lest by her touch our things might be polluted."

On March 17, 1899, Abhayananda came to Calcutta after a successful lecture tour in Madras and Bombay. Her former name was Marie Louis and she had taken the vows of Sannyasa from the Swami when he was in America. On March 25, she breakfasted with Nivedita at the Math. It seems probable that on seeing her the idea of taking the final vows of Sannyasa came to Nivedita.

On April 23, she went to the Math again and had lunch with the Swami. She asked him then what perfection she should strive for in order to be worthy of being a Sannyasini. The Swami quickly replied, "You just keep as you are" and that sealed for all time her determination to be a Sannyasini. Cautiously she enquired whether her running about and paying visits was a blemish in his eyes, as it appeared to her, to which the Swami replied that it was not so.

As Nivedita was not initiated into Sannyasa, she never put on the Gerua habit of a Sannyasini. But in various books and articles, she is described as 'Gerua-clad', but this is nothing but a streak of imagination. Abanindranath Tagore who met her in 1902 describes her as "Mahasveta". From various sources it is definitely known that she usually put on a white dress; sometimes, she wore a yellow coloured gown. Dr. Radha Gobinda Kar's reference to her as 'Gerua-clad' during his first meeting with her in 1899 is not correct. For at that time she had worn the ordinary dress of the European ladies as can be seen in her photo with the Holy Mother.

21. *Work for Women*

THOUGH THE SWAMI did not wish Nivedita to go through the final Samskaras of Sannyasa that any dedicated soul "called to the service of the Lord" would choose to undergo, he never for a moment considered her unfit for receiving it. According to him, renunciation and selfless service were the guiding principles of the life of the religious man, and faith and devotion his strength. Nivedita lacked neither. But initiation laid certain obligations of code of conduct and rituals on the person receiving it, and limited the field of activity. These, the Swami perhaps thought, would retard than help Nivedita in her mission, therefore, he did not formally initiate her into Sannyasa

This did not, however, exclude Nivedita from the Swami's mission. "My mission is not Ramakrishna's nor Vedanta's nor anything, but simply to bring manhood to my people," the Swami once said to Nivedita.

"I will help you, Swami," she said.

"I know it," he replied.

And as these words were spoken, Nivedita, as it were took upon herself the burden of his work. Her work and life testified that she kept her word to the last days of her life.

The cause of his people, especially women, was uppermost in the Swami's mind. "Never forget! The word is 'Women and the People' ", the Swami said to Nivedita one day when he lay ill in a foreign country.

His talks and lectures were replete with utterances such as:

"In India there are two great evils. Trampling on the women, and grinding the poor."

"The uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses, must come first, and then only can any real good come about for the country, for India."

"There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness.

When the Swami was at the 'Thousand Island Park', Christine with a friend of hers, Mrs. Funke, turned up unexpectedly. Mrs. Funke wrote later:

> It was a dark and rainy night and we were weary after our long journey, but we could not rest until we had seen him face to face. Would he accept us? And if he did not, what then could we do? It suddenly seemed to us that it might be a foolish thing to go several hundred miles to find a man who did not even know of our existence, but we plodded on up the hill in rain and in darkness.

On meeting the Swami, Christine said: "We have come to you just as we would go to Jesus if he were still on the earth and ask him to teach us." He looked at them kindly and said gently, "If only I possessed the power of the Christ to set you free now."

The Swami stayed for seven days in Detroit on his second visit to America and Christine met him often. She had met Nivedita in England before. When Nivedita went to Detroit, Christine helped her to collect funds and accepted the Secretaryship of the Detroit Committee.

In 1902, with the Swami's blessings and consent Christine came to India with the express desire of helping Nivedita in her educational work. The Swami had noticed her great gifts of renunciation and service and had said: "I need her for my work in Calcutta."

After her arrival the Swami wrote to her:

> I know you are great, and my faith is always in your true heart. I worry about everything except you. I have dedicated you to the Mother. She is your shield, your guide. No harm can reach you—nothing can hold you down a minute, I know it.

Though Christine's sweet and patient nature widely differed from Nivedita's fiery and impatient nature, they became very good friends. Nivedita was full of praise for Christine. "She is absolutely staunch. She is gentle and clinging, and not

too dominant, but she is loyal and sympathetic and generous. Perfect in sweetness and perfect in trustworthiness and so large in her views." And again, "Christine is, beyond words, soothing, gracious, lovely."

Her arrival greatly relieved Nivedita. On March 23, Nivedita spoke at the Classic Theatre on 'The Hindu Mind in Modern Science'. In the summer of 1902, Nivedita and Christine left for Mayavati. The Seviers and Mr. Okakura accompanied them. Mr. Okakura was a Japanese and his love and respect for Indian art and culture made him a great friend of India. In 1901, with Mr. Oda, a high-priest of a Buddhist monastery in Japan, he had come to India to invite the Swami to attend a Parliament of Religions to be held in Japan. The Swami could not accept the invitation due to ill-health. Mr. Okakura stayed on in India for a long time. He was engaged during this time in writing a book, *Ideals of the East*. Nivedita edited the entire book and wrote an introduction to it. He visited Bodh Gaya and many other places with Nivedita.

Nivedita and party reached Mayavati via Kathgodam on May 11. Swami Swarupananda was the President of the Mayavati Centre. Nivedita spent a few days in the peace and quiet of the Himalayas and left for the plains again on June 20.

29. *Last Benediction*

After the Swami returned from Banaras, Nivedita met him at the Math. Casually, in his talk the Swami told her that he was going away. Talks were then going on about his going to Japan and so Nivedita thought he was referring to it. How was she to know what he really meant!

The Swami's health did not improve on his return but deteriorated. On March 11 was Sri Ramakrishna's birthday and there was a great rush of devotees at the Math. But Swami Niranjanananda kept a strict guard at the Swami's doors and very few could see him. Nivedita went with some English friends and met him for a short time.

The same year sports were arranged on the Math grounds and Nivedita was invited to distribute the prizes. The Swami did not leave his room, but watched the progress of the sports from his window. Miss MacLeod was standing by his side. All of a sudden he turned to her and said: "I will never reach forty." He was then in his thirtyninth year, and the words came true. This was the last that Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod saw of the Swami. For immediately after both of them left for America.

Nivedita reached Calcutta on June 26, and the Swami visited her at her residence at 17 Bosepara Lane on the 28th. That was the Swami's farewell visit to her. For the end was nearing.

On June 29, Nivedita went to the Math and met the Swami. This time too he said, "A great austerity and meditation are coming upon me, I am making ready for death." On Wednesday, July 22, Nivedita went to the Math again. It was an Ekadashi. The Swami himself had fasted, but insisted on serving meals to Nivedita. At the end of the meals, he poured water over her hands and dried them with a towel. A natural protest rose from Nivedita's lips

"It is I who should do these things for you, Swamiji. Not

you, for me!" To which he replied solemnly—"Jesus washed the feet of his disciples!" The words—'But that was the last time' came to Nivedita's lips but she did not utter them. It was well the words were not spoken, for here also, the last time had come. How many times and in how many ways the expected hints were given by the compassionate Master to his disciples! But they fell on ears that did not hear and on minds that could not understand.

Nivedita was with him for three hours on that day. She later wrote to her friend Mrs. Nell Hammond:

> On Wednesday morning I went again, and stayed three hours. I think now that he knew I would never see him again. Such blessings! I cannot tell you. If I had only known! As it was, well as he looked, I was so full of the idea of the care he required, that I introduced no topic lest it might agitate him, and I dreaded overstaying lest I should make him tired. If I had only known how precious every moment would have been, but oh! how unbearable."

The Swami's last days passed in normal activities, though as Nivedita said: "One was conscious the while of a luminous presence, of which his bodily form seemed only as a shadow or symbol."

On Friday, the Swami seemed well, stronger than he had been for years. He was in the shrine till noon, gave Sanskrit lessons to boys for three hours in the afternoon and talked to everyone he met. In the evening he went out for a walk.

The same evening he sent a message to Nivedita at Calcutta that he was feeling better. Nivedita dreamt that night that Sri Ramakrishna was leaving his body a second time. Early in the morning on the next day a messenger from the Math conveyed to her the news about the Swami's passing away. Nivedita was thunder-struck. She immediately left for the Math. On reaching there she learnt that the previous evening after Aratrika, the Swami had sat in meditation. After an hour he lay down on his bed on the floor and asked a disciple who was attending him to fan him. Another hour passed, his hand shook a little, then came two deep breaths and all was over.

The whole of the morning Nivedita sat by the Swami and fanned him till the body was brought down at 2 P.M. to the porch leading to the courtyard. The body was covered with a fresh Gerua cloth and was decorated with flowers After Aratrika it was taken to the spot which had been indicated for cremation by himself Nivedita followed the procession that marched slowly with the body to the Bilwa-tree, while the skies were rent with the shouts 'Jai Sri Guru Maharajji ki Jai'! 'Jai Sri Swamiji Maharajji ki Jai!"

As Nivedita stood near the burning pyre, she saw a certain cloth covering the bed top and she asked Swami Sadananda, "Is this going to be burnt? It is the last thing I ever saw him wear." Swami Sadananda offered to give it to her there and then but she refused it as it would have been unseemly. She was thinking of her dear friend Josephine MacLeod. If only she could give her a piece of that cloth!

By six o'clock, still sitting near the burning pyre, she felt as if she was twitched by the sleeve and she looked down, and out of all that burning and blackness, there blew to her feet a small piece of that same cloth. She bent down and picked up the sacred relic.

30. *A Step Forward*

NIVEDITA INSCRIBED just two words in her diary on July 4, 1902—"Swami died." No words could express the deep sense of loss she felt at her Master's departure. But she had no time to sorrow, she had to carry on his work. His words spoken years ago rang in her ears "It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body—to cast it off like a worn-out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere until the world shall know that it is one with God!"

Nivedita knew that the Swami's inspiration was to work through her. She wrote in a prayerful mood to a friend:

> Pray that I may have strength and faithfulness and knowledge to do this and ask no other blessing for me. I want no other. He is not dead, he is with us always. I cannot even grieve, I only want to work.

Strangely enough, during her stay in the West, Nivedita's work and interests had far extended the limits of a strictly spiritual organization like the Ramakrishna Mission. It had been expressly mentioned by the Swami in the Rules and Regulations of the Mission that "the aims and ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics." Therefore, a few days after the Swami's death Nivedita was faced with a grave problem. As a monastic member of the Order it became obligatory on her part to give up her political associations and interests But her own feelings were against such a step. She was frank about it. "I belong to Hinduism more than I ever did. But I see the *political* need so clearly too!"

A few days before the Swami passed away, she talked to him about it also when she met him at the Belur Math. During the conversation she broached the subject of the

Home for widows and orphans of which she had thought so much before she left for the West. The Swami said it was a folly to have such Homes in India for they would do more harm than good. To which Nivedita's immediate rejoinder was: "Yes, don't you see! That's exactly what I say that the *other question* must be answered first! Then all questions of education." The Swami understood that by the *other question* Nivedita meant political freedom. He solemnly replied: "Well, well, Margot, perhaps you are right, only I feel that I am drawing near to death. I cannot bend my mind to these worldly things now."

It cannot be inferred from this reply that the Swami approved of her way of thinking. It also cannot be said whether, had he been living, he would have allowed Nivedita to carry on according to her own ideas. But this much can be said that the Swami knew that once an idea got possession of Nivedita's mind, it could not be easily effaced. And he never worried about it. On one such occasion he had laughingly remarked: "Well, Margot, I see, this is the period of your such-and-such-a-conviction as you have had others, and this will pass on as the others did"

The *other question* that made Nivedita take interest in the current political activities in the country and get acquainted with political leaders of different parties, created a new problem not only for her, but also for the Math authorities. It was difficult for Swami Brahmananda and others to say how the Swami would have acted under the circumstances, but of this they were certain, that their monastic Order was to be above politics. So they requested Nivedita to think about the matter seriously.

Nivedita went to the Math on July 8, but as Mr. Okakura was with her she could not talk with the Swamis on this subject. On July 10, she went again to the Math and had a long talk about it with Swami Brahmananda and Swami Saradananda She could not come to any decision then. The Swami was no more. To whom could she turn for guidance? On the one hand, there was the Order started in the name of Sri Ramakrishna by her beloved Master and there were Swami Brahmananda and others for whom she had equal love and respect, and on the other hand were the promptings of

her own heart. She could not remain constrained by the restrictions of the Order. It was the Swami's dream to see India great and strong again. How could that be fulfilled without bringing about a national awakening amongst her children?

Years ago, one day, the Swami had said to her: "My mission is not Ramakrishna's nor Vedanta's nor anything but simply to bring manhood to my people." "I will help you," Nivedita had sworn. Gravely had the Swami replied. "I know it." Was it not her duty now to give to the nation what she had received from the Swami? The nation needed her. What was she to do now?

Some days later, Swami Brahmananda again wrote to her to learn about her decision. Nivedita replied on July 18, as follows:

Dear Swami Brahmananda,

Will you accept on behalf of the Order and myself my acknowledgement of your letter received this evening. Painful as the occasion, I can but acquiesce in any measures that are necessary to my complete personal freedom.

I trust, however, that you and other members of the Order will not fail to lay my love and reverence daily at the foot of the ashes of Sri Ramakrishna and my own beloved Guru.

I shall write to the Indian papers and acquaint them as quietly as possible with my changed position.

Yours in all gratitude and good faith,

Nivedita of Ramakrishna

Up till now Nivedita had signed her name as 'Nivedita of the Ramakrishna Order'. Henceforward she wrote 'Nivedita of Ramakrishna' only, later changing it to 'of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda'. For though she had left the Order, she felt sure she still belonged to them and that the Swami would not hold her less his child than before.

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of July 19, published the following news-item:

SISTER NIVEDITA

> We have been requested to inform the public that at the conclusion of the days of mourning of Swami Vivekananda, it has been decided between the members of the Order at Belur Math and Sister Nivedita that her work shall henceforth be regarded as free and entirely independent of their sanction or authority.

With this the second chapter of Nivedita's life came to a close. Prayerfully she wrote: "Keep our faith alive that this, and no other is for us, that there is no unfaithfulness in doing the greatest right and never can be." According to her thinking her views had not changed but had only become larger and truer. The Swami's ideal was there but it was something impersonal, not limited by name. Her thoughts had been focussed to a central point and that was 'nation-making.' In that context the Swami's idea of 'man-making' amounted to 'nation-making', and that was the task she had undertaken.

She wrote to Miss MacLeod to whom the story of the change of her thoughts had gone on unfolding in her letters:

> We talk of 'woman-making'. But the great stream of the Oriental woman's life flows on. Who am I that I should in any way seek to change it? Suppose even I could add my impress to ten or twelve girls, would it be so much gain? Is it not rather by taking the national consciousness of the women, like that of the men, and setting it towards greater problems and responsibilities that one can help?. . I don't know. This may be all my own sophistry, I cannot tell. Only I think my task is to awake the nation, not to influence a few women.

Now she earnestly resolved to dedicate herself to the task before her. She decided to travel to different parts of India to obtain first-hand knowledge of the people among whom she intended to propagate the ideas of the Swami.

31. The West Indian Tour

ON JULY 19, 1902, Nivedita left Calcutta for Jessore to address a memorial meeting in honour of the Swami. She returned on the 21st. On the 29th, the eleventh Vidyasagar Anniversary meeting was held at the Classic Theatre. Mr. R. C. Dutt was in the chair and Nivedita was one of the speakers. She said she thought that at a meeting like that no one could say that Bengal was in any way sectarian. They had joined together as members of a great nation to pay their tribute to the memory of a great man in the truest and widest sense of the word.

Nivedita fell ill during the first week of August. When news reached the Belur Math, Swami Brahmananda and Swami Saradananda came down to see her. As she had become very weak, the monks put her on a diet of chickens and eggs. For years now Nivedita had trained herself to a life of extreme simplicity and a meagre vegetarian diet. So this arrangement seemed to her unorthodox and extravagant. But as prolonged illness had been a dreadful experience which weakened her considerably, she consented to abide by their instructions. Health now seemed to her the first consideration.

After her recovery, Nivedita thought of the two immediate problems before her, viz. making provisions for a growing income, and her future plan of action. She lived a simple austere life, yet money was never enough. Out of her meagre earnings she helped some poor women of the neighbourhood by paying them eight annas per week. The only possible means of earning that she could think of was finishing her book, *The Web of Indian Life*, which, she was sure, would make a hit.

Her programme of work included extensive touring in different parts of India. Her first call was from Bombay. And so on September 21, she left for Bombay via Nagpur. Swami Sadananda accompanied her and became a great source of strength and inspiration to her.

Her first lecture in Bombay was arranged at the Gaiety Theatre on Friday, the 26th, when she spoke on the Swami. On the 29th and 30th two more lectures were arranged at the same theatre and she spoke on 'The Unity of Asia' and 'Hindu Mind in Modern Science'. About a thousand people attended the lectures

Special mention may be made of the last lecture which was delivered under the auspices of the 'Students' Brotherhood'. Mr. Justice N. G. Chandavarkar was the chairman. The suggestive, thoughtful and stimulating address was highly appreciated by the audience, especially the students, whom she addressed most of the time. She said that to the Indian youth nothing was so excellent as the practice of Brahmacharya. That was the only means of charging oneself with spiritual power.

She was long applauded when she concluded with these words:

> European science has now attained to such a high pitch of cultivation that it could observe with the utmost accuracy the laws governing molecular physics.... But even this science was as nothing to what the grotesque-looking Yogi studies in his solitude—Nature. His was a grander study than the study of the other intellectual activities put together. To them who could distinguish by their spiritual attainments the real in the midst of the unreal, and life in the midst of death, belonged eternal strength and empire and to none else.

All her lectures carried religious, philosophical as well as social interest and attracted a considerable amount of public attention particularly amongst the Hindus. More invitations came to her and by special requests she gave three more lectures. All of them were announced and reported in the newspapers like *The Bombay Gazette* and the *Times of India*.

On October 1, the members of the Hindu Union Club invited Nivedita to a tea-party at the express desire of the ladies of their families. Nivedita never missed the opportunity of meeting ladies; so she readily accepted the invitation. Professor Padhye briefly related in English the object of the

meeting and the Hon. Sir Balchandra Krishna addressed a few words in Marathi for the benefit of the ladies who did not understand English. Nivedita then talked to the ladies and the party dispersed after light refreshments.

The visit to Bombay of an English lady who had become a thorough Hindu and who lectured on the sublimity of the Hindu religion created quite a sensation and naturally inspired an eager curiosity, among women especially, to see and hear her. So on October 2, the Hindu Ladies' Social Club invited her to lecture at the Pitale Hall at C. P. Tank Road

On her arrival she was greeted by Mrs. Kothari and Mrs. Pitale, the President and the Honorary Secretary respectively of the Club.

Nivedita said that she felt it would be presumptous on her part to speak to the Hindu ladies on the subject of Hindu religion, for it was better understood and practised by the ladies themselves. She would therefore answer questions or discourse on any other subject chosen by the audience. She was then requested to speak on what induced her to change her religion and how she accomplished it.

Nivedita briefly related the circumstances which led her to embrace the Hindu religion. Her search for Truth led her to follow different churches till the turning point of her life came after meeting Swami Vivekananda. In the end she appealed to the ladies to study the grand literature of the East in preferencc to the literature of the West and to cling to the simplicity and sobriety of their domestic lives.

The organizers were deeply touched by her talk and presented her with a volume of the Rig Veda and a rosary of 108 Rudraksha beads, on which Sister Nivedita said she would daily invoke the blessings of Mahadeva on her sisters. They were all her sisters being the daughters of her land of adoption where she hoped to continue the work of her revered Guru Swami Vivekananda.

On October 4, the residents of the Goregaonkar Buildings at Girgaon requested her to address a gathering. Invitations were issued to outsiders and there was a large attendance. She was introduced to the audience by Professor Deodhar. She addressed the ladies first and her speech was translated

into Marathi by Professor Deodhar. She afterwards addressed the men on the subject of education for women, pleading for their enlightenment and emancipation.

The last occasion on which Sister Nivedita could meet the public was a lecture arranged at the Gaiety Theatre on October 6, on 'Indian Womanhood'. The Hon. Mr. Gokaldas Parekh presided and said the lecturer needed no introduction as she was no longer a stranger to them.

In an interesting lecture, the speaker discussed the difference in the manners and customs of the people of the West and the East She spoke of the moral genius in the personal character of the Asiatic women. But as to the future of the Indian women, she stressed that right education was necessary.

In the end, thanking her, the President said that they had the highest admiration for her intellectual powers; that they were extremely obliged to her for bringing home to them many profound truths, and for the manner in which she had gone into the intricate problems of Vedanta and for the depth of her devotion and faith which had induced her to come from her country and lead a life of asceticism in a strange land; and that they signified their sincere appreciation by their most unstinted applause.

Thus ended the first stage of her lecture tour. Nivedita was herself overwhelmed by the tremendous welcome given by Bombay and wrote to Miss MacLeod from Bombay:

> I was precipitated upon the task somewhat more suddenly than we expected, as you see Oh! it is good to hear the words you tell from Swami—'India shall ring with her.' Is that the plan which is now being fulfilled?"

With a hopeful heart, on October 7, Nivedita with Swami Sadananda arrived at Nagpur and stayed as a guest of Justice Kohlatkar. She lectured on all the four days that she was there. The last day of her stay, the 11th, was full with as many as four engagements, all with students. In the early morning she addressed the students at the Quadrangle, a little later she presided and spoke at a sports function; again in the afternoon she visited a school and in the evening addressed another students' meeting. The students received

the Swami's message with great faith and Nivedita was much encouraged by the success of her mission.

She left for Wardha on October 14. The same evening she spoke on 'Christianity' and the next day on 'Swami Vivekananda' and 'Bhakti and Education'. On October 16, she reached Amaraoti. There she spoke on the following two days on the 'Sages of Asia' and 'Hinduism in the Light of Modern Thought'.

Nivedita reached Baroda on October 20, 1902. There for for three successive days she spoke on 'Old and New', 'Asiatic Unity' and 'Mother Worship' respectively.

One important event that took place in Baroda was her meeting with Sri Aurobindo. Many fantastic stories regarding revolutionary activities later evolved round the meeting of these two persons, first in Baroda and afterwards in Calcutta. But Sri Aurobindo has himself corrected many wrong statements appearing in the Press in this connection. The matter will be discussed in a later chapter.

Regarding his first meeting with Nivedita in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

> I do not remember whether she was invited but I think she was there as a State guest. Khasirao and myself went to receive her at the station. I do not remember Nivedita speaking to me on spiritual subjects or about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. We spoke of politics and other subjects. On the way from the station to the town she cried out against the ugliness of the College building and its top-heavy dome and praised the Dharmashala near it. Khasirao stared at her and opined that she must be at least slightly cracked to have such ideas! I was very much enamoured at the time of her book *Kali the Mother* and I think we spoke of that.*

The Gaekwar invited Nivedita to tea once. From her diary we come to know that she received a letter on the 23rd from the Gaekwar about which she was quite upset. Next day she saw the Gaekwar again.

She left for Ahmedabad on the 26th. The three lectures

* *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, p 96 f

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delivered on the 26th, the 28th and the 29th were 'Karma', 'Asiatic Unity' and 'Swami Vivekananda' respectively.

On her way back to Bombay, she detrained at Bandra to see the Kannery Caves. From there she proceeded towards Ellora, via Daulatabad, which she reached on November 3. The beauty of the natural surroundings and holiness of Ellora so struck her that she wrote: "To all eternity, while the earth remains what she is, Ellora will be one of the spots where the mystery of God is borne in, in overwhelming measure, upon the souls of men, whatever their associations, whatever their creed."

As Nivedita was feeling tired, she dropped the idea of visiting Pandharpur and Hyderabad, and returned to Calcutta on November 7. On the 23rd, she was invited for a lecture at Chandernagore. And on the 29th and 30th respectively, she spoke at the Vivekananda Society and the New Indian Institute.

32. In the South

Now South India invited Nivedita. On December 8, she left for Madras with Swami Sadananda. Swami Sadananda suggested that they could celebrate the Christmas at Khandagiri on the way. As her programme at Madras was fixed for the Christmas, they went to Khandagiri and observed the Christmas Eve there on December 13.

"It was evening," Nivedita recorded, "and we sat on the grass, round a lighted log, while on one side of us rose the hills, with their caves and carven rocks, and all around us whispered the sleeping forest. We were to keep Christmas Eve, in the old-time fashion of the Order of Ramakrishna."

With Swami Sadananda was Brahmachari Amulya, now Swami Sankarananda, the present President of the Ramakrishna Order. Both of them dressed like shepherds and held crooks in their hands. They had a copy of the Gospel of St. Luke with them. They read about the Wise Men of the East and the Angels, appearing to Shepherds, who abode in the fields at night. The great life as a whole was passed in review, then to Death and finally the Resurrection. And on that great silent night, Sister Nivedita felt that the very mythology of the Christian faith became creditable once more, refixed, reinstated and illuminated by the wisdom, the character and the daily life of this Eastern land.

The next day they left Khandagiri and, via Waltair, Bezwada and Guntakal reached Madras on December 19, 1902, where they put up with Swami Ramakrishnananda at Castle Kernan.

Madras was not a new place for Nivedita. She had not forgotten the spontaneous and warm reception accorded to her by Madras on her return from the West in the beginning of the same year. By some divine plan, Madras had a prominent part to play in furthering the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. During the Swami's itinerary when he was still

unknown, it was here that he secured many young devoted adherents among whom he could spread his Master's message. They collected funds for him to go to America, and spread his message in India far and wide long before his return. On his home-coming, Madras gave him a royal welcome. He stayed for nine days at the Castle Kernan. It was then that some disciples requested him to establish a permanent centre in Madras to carry on his work. The Swami acquiesced and said. "I shall send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox men of the South and who is at the same time unique and unsurpassed in his worship and meditation of God." And he sent Swami Ramakrishnananda.

Sri Biligiri Aiyangar offered the outhouses of the Castle Kernan to Swami Ramakrishnananda to start a monastery. Within a short time Swami Ramakrishnananda's devotion, learning and selfless work attracted a large number of people and his name became a household word in the city.

It was at this monastery at Castle Kernan that Nivedita stayed. She held the dignified and strong Swami Ramakrishnananda in great respect. With his students he attended every programme of Nivedita and that gave her much encouragement

On December 20, Nivedita spoke on 'The Unity of India' at the Pachaiyappa's Hall. The lecture was arranged by the Young Men's Hindu Association A large audience of educated Hindus was present.

This was one of the best lectures of Nivedita. She offered a short prayer to Shiva and Guru in the beginning and commenced her lecture, emphasising the need to comprehend the essential unity of India Unity, she said, was not a thing of the past, nor of the future, it was actual and living, only the children of the soil were not aware of it.

> I see actually face to face as I see the sun in the sky at midday that we in India have a great synthesis, an unparalleled synthesis, full of strength, majesty and potentiality and hope that the day would come when we should understand and know that and act on the strength of it.

India was a nation, one and undivided, and Nivedita

brought to the minds of the audience but one word, and left it there that every breath as it was breathed out and every breath as it was breathed in, might breathe in and out that word—*nationality*.

The English had taught the Indian to believe that it was only after the introduction of cheap postage, the extended railway travel and the common use of the English language that India had been united. Nivedita stoutly refused to believe this and said:

> If India had no unity herself, no unity could be given to her. The unity which undoubtedly belonged to India was self-born and had its own destiny, its own functions and its own vast powers; but it was the gift of no one.

She ended with a high note of hope and inspiration:

> Yet again shall come the great re-establishment of Dharma when the whole of this nation shall be united together not in a common weakness, not in a common misfortune or grievance but in a great, overflowing, complex, actual, ever strong, ever-living consciousness of the common nationality, the common heritage, the common struggle, the common life, aye! the common destiny and the common hope. And so let me in all reverence and in all grateful memory and love repeat to you again these words that were spoken here in our midst a few years ago by a voice so dear, so well remembered by you all —those words that were the text of his message to his land for ever more—"Arise, awake, struggle on and rest not till the goal is reached."

On behalf of the Association, Professor M. Rangacharya conveyed their sincerest thanks to Nivedita and said he believed that they would all cheerfully carry the burden of duty that the Sister had placed upon their shoulders.

A ladies' meeting was fixed for the 23rd, but due to some unfortunate accident Nivedita could not attend it. She, therefore, wrote an open letter to the Hindu ladies which was published in *The Hindu* on December 24.

Regretting her inability to attend the meeting, she said:

> I understand that it was your love and reverence for my great Guru that led you to gather in such large numbers at the Tondamandalam High School Hall. It would have been an unspeakable pleasure to me could I have seen you face to face and talked with you of what his coming meant to us in the West, and of all his burning hopes for the people of his own land. It was his conviction that the future of India depended even more on Indian women than on Indian men. And his faith in us all was immense. It was Indian women who went gladly to the burning pyre, in days of old, to burn beside the dead body of the husbands and no hand was strong enough to turn them back. Sita was an Indian woman. So was Savitri. Uma, performing austerities to draw Mahadeva to her side, was the picture of an Indian woman. Was there any task, he argued, to which such as these could prove unequal?
>
> In all lands holiness and strength are the treasures which the race places in the hands of woman to preserve, rather than in those of man. A few men here and there become great teachers, but most have to spend their days in toil for the winning of the bread. It is in the home that these renew their inspiration and their faith and insight, and the greatness of the home lies in the Tapasya of women. You, Indian wives and mothers, do not need to be reminded of how much Sri Rama, Sri Krishna and Sankaracharya owed to their mothers. The quiet, silent lives of women, living in their homes like Tapasvinis proud only to be faithful, ambitious only to be perfect, have done more to preserve the Dharma and cause it to flourish than any battles that have been fought outside.
>
> Today our country and her Dharma are in a sore plight, and in a special manner she calls on her daughters at the moment to come forward, as those in the ages before, to aid her with a great Sraddha. "How shall this be done?"—we are all asking In the first place let Hindu mothers renew in their sons the thirst for

Brahmacharya without which our nation is shorn of her ancient strength. No country in the world has an ideal of the student's life so high as in this country and if it be allowed to die out of India where shall the world look to restore it? In Brahmacharya is the secret of all strength, all greatness. Let every mother determine that her sons shall be great! And secondly, can we not cultivate in our children and ourselves a vast compassion? This compassion will make us eager to know the sorrows of all men, the griefs of our land and the dangers to which, in these modern days, our religion is exposed, and this growing knowledge will produce strong workers, working for work's sake, ready to die, if only they may serve their country and fellowmen. Let us realize all that our country has done for us—how she has given us birth and food and friends, our beloved ones, and our faith itself. Is she not indeed our Mother? Do we not long to see her once more 'Maha-Bharata'? Such are a few of the things, beloved mothers, and sisters, that I think that my Guruji would have said to you in so many better words than I have been able to find.

I thank you once more for the reverence you have shown him in the honour done to my so unworthy self. I beg of you always,—for his sake, who made me his daughter, and therefore your countrywoman, to think of me and pray for me as your little sister, who loves this beautiful and holy land and who longs only to be shown how to serve you more and more effectively. And may I remind you also of him who stood behind Swami Vivekananda, his Guru Ramakrishna Paramahamsa; and Kali, the Great Mother, whose power worked through both of these great souls, and will yet work doubtless, in any of us who will but lend ourselves to Her influence?

In his name and in the love of that Great Mother, I commend myself to you, ladies,

Ever your most loving sister,
Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda

In Madras, as in other places, Nivedita missed no opportunity

to meet young students. As a result of Swami Ramakrishnananda's efforts, the students had been made already familiar with the ideals of Swami Vivekananda. Groups of such students, fired by the Swami's glorious name, banded themselves together and under Sri Ramakrishnananda's guidance started Vivekananda Societies at various places throughout the Presidency. These societies organized lectures and conducted regular classes on Vedanta, sang devotional songs and did the work of educating and feeding the poor.

These students and workers met Nivedita often to discuss with her many subjects like *the Unity of India*, *Nationalism*, *the Swami's Idealism* and *Hindu Religion*. Her views on the method and scope of work of such Vivekananda Societies can be gathered from her article 'Suggestions for the Indian Vivekananda Societies'.

Thus, besides public lectures, Nivedita's programme included many conversational meetings, of which the following have been noted either in her diary or announced in the newspapers.

On Sunday, December 21, under the auspices of the Komaleswaranpet Progressive Union at the Raja Sir Annamalai Mudaliar Free Reading Room Hall.

On the 22nd, talk on 'Saints of the East and the West'.

23rd—7 a.m. Conversational meeting at the Young Men's Association, Mylapore.

24th—Conversational meeting at Chintadripet Literary Society at H. M. Maharaja Vijayanagram's Girls' School.

26th—Lecture on 'The New Message' under the auspices of the Triplicane Literary Society in Pachhayiappa's Hall.

27th and 28th—Conversational meetings.

On December 30, Nivedita left for Conjeevaram. A hearty reception was given to her at the railway station where a conversation was opened on the meaning and scope of the word Dharma according to the Hindu Scriptures.

The next day at eight in the morning she delivered a very instructive lecture at the Pachhaiyappa's High School and exhorted the audience to realize the ancient greatness of India and to conduct themselves true to their illustrious past.

She left for Madras the same evening. Thus ended the

year 1902, the most important and active year in Nivedita's life.

The New Year, 1903, began with the first public celebration of Swami Vivekananda's Birthday. It fell on January 20. A large number of devotees gathered at the Castle Kernan where Nivedita was putting up. The day began with devotional music. A gorgeously decorated photo of the Swami was later worshipped. Nivedita attended the worship the whole morning. In the afternoon about five hundred people were fed. Towards the evening, a public meeting was held. Many old friends and disciples of the Swami related their reminiscences of him. The day-long celebration ended with Aratrika and distribution of Prasad. It was a great day.

Nivedita was glad at heart to see how the people of South India had accepted the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and the message of Swami Vivekananda. In the following letter we learn of this:

> I think infinitely more of Sri Ramakrishna's life now than I used to do. I want to see our men standing in groups at all corners of India, not as workers, but simply to pray and witness the lives of Swamiji and Sri Ramakrishna. These two lives *are* the unity of India. All that is necessary is that India should keep them in her heart.

Having spent some of her sweetest and most useful days in the Castle Kernan, it pained her to know that as the ownership of the building had changed, it was to be sold off. The Monastery had no funds to buy it up and so it was to be given up.

The day after the celebration, Nivedita left for Calcutta. She had received invitations from various places in the Presidency; but through the newspaper columns she announced her inability to accept them and expressed her thanks to the gentlemen who had invited her.

33. *New Plans and Projects*

AFTER HER RETURN to Calcutta, Nivedita turned her attention to her small school. The school had reopened in February 1902, but since then Nivedita was so much occupied with various other activities that she could not spare time for it. The school was virtually run by Miss Bett, who had accompanied Nivedita from London. In the last week of January 1903, Nivedita once more engaged herself in the school. She was joined in her work by Christine in March.

The curriculum of the school included Bengali, Reading and Writing, Arithmetic, Geography and History. As the school was founded on the kindergarten system "in which all knowledge is supposed to receive a foundation in concrete experience and all work to appear to the child as play", drawing from observation, brush-work, clay-modelling, mat-weaving, paper cutting, sewing and games were introduced in the course of studies.

Both Nivedita and Christine were familiar with the latest methods of education and in a short time they made a success of their experiment. Nivedita took keen interest in every child who attended the school and kept a detailed record of her progress. In all, there were forty-five girls in the school. The following extracts from Nivedita's carefully kept record would be very illuminating.

Santoshini Datta:

Caste Kayastha. Attended 51 times out of 60. Santoshini is said to resemble her grandmother in being witty, sociable, agreeable and utterly superficial. It is a very clever and happy kind of superficiality, however. I like the child. She picks up English well Her colour work is excellent. She has an intense love of manual occupations, in which she becomes perfectly absorbed and never tires of repetition. Learns good manners easily.

Bidyutmala Bose:
Caste Kayastha. Attended 45 times out of 60. One of the strongest characters I have ever seen. Her courage and determination are wonderful. And she has exquisite taste. She was troublesome and disobedient till I had a quiet talk with her the other day—since then a smile has been enough. And the daintiest offerings have constantly arrived. She has fire and will enough for anything but will be smothered in marriage of course. Her sewing is particularly good. Let me make special memorial of the garland of pink and white flowers in the green plait lying solitary in its basket.

Gyanadabala:
Caste Koyburtho. Attended 22 times. A funny low-class child, with the kindest of hearts and a mania for homework. She never liked lessons and could hardly be taught to read but if she could clean the schoolroom or help Bett she was in clover. Afterwards in the days of plague work, she would dog me on the inspection round. It turned out that she kept a little shop for her mother. She wanted to be much more liberal than her mother one day when I went to buy bananas —and I cannot forget the quick flush of shame with which she received the mother's restrictions.

M. N.:
Caste Gowalla. Attended 39 times out of 60. Such a good, sweet, quiet, painstaking child! One of the best, sweetest and cleverest children I have ever known. Most retiring and ceaselessly good. Easily lost in work.

From the reports, it can be seen that girls of all classes attended the school and each received special attention from Nivedita They loved their dear Sister and were always friendly and free with her. They ran up to her when they saw her either in the lanes, the riverside or the bazars. Nivedita wrote about a young girl, Bhabarani Chatterjee, who went to her in the afternoons to teach Bengali.

"A very, very clever and very queer girl. Terrible voice, but how good and quick! Very dark and specially non-Aryan looking. No grace of form or manner in any way about

her. Yet the soul of kindness She has a brother with whom she is a great friend and at one time they used to come and call on me in the afternoon and give me Bengali reading lessons."

One day a specially good and painstaking girl who was good at painting, in a wild fit of curiosity and activity, emptied Nivedita's new paint box and spoilt a new book, making rough design in brushwork. But when she repented, she got no punishment.

There were two conditions which hampered the progress of the girls, namely, irregular attendance and child marriage. Neither the pupils nor their parents considered regular attendance essential But Nivedita felt distressed, as any good teacher was bound to feel. Regarding two such irregular girls she wrote:

"These girls were nice and good and won my regard from the first by having no ornaments on their faces They were capricious however about coming. There was evidently no one to insist. Hence, clever as they were, one could do nothing with them."

As regards the second problem of child-marriage, she could do nothing but feel sorry for a bright promising pupil. If one girl stood quite apart from others and showed extraordinary talents and desired to continue her studies, Nivedita only hoped she would be saved from marriage. About one such girl she noted:

"Now she is a great deal more dexterous than I. Her brushwork is good She spontaneously drew Shiva temple one day. She is determined not to marry and has told someone she trusts that, if forced, she will commit suicide. She has tremendous conscience and most refined feelings and plenty of strong common-sense. She takes quickly to great ideas and must be saved from marriage!"

Even with these handicaps the Children's School continued its progress steadily. It was at this time that Nivedita and Christine made plans for starting a Women's Section. It was decided to invite ladies to the school in the afternoon and to secure a carriage in which the ladies could be taken to the school.

The suggestions were approved by Swami Brahmananda and

Swami Saradananda. They did not think it would be difficult for the Sisters to bring together ladies for the purpose, because within their short stay at Baghbazar, they had won the affection and respect of the intensely orthodox ladies of the neighbourhood. Sometimes the ladies came in the evening and sat in the basket chairs with cushions provided by the Sisters who themselves sat on the floor to talk to them. They enjoyed it; for, these cultured ladies never showed the least surprise or shyness about foreign ways. When Nivedita and Christine returned their visits, they received them with a quiet dignity that appealed to the Sisters.

On October 26, 1903, a ladies' meeting was held in the school. Swami Saradananda delivered a lecture on the *Gita*. Mrs. Bull who had just returned from Japan was Nivedita's guest. She was also present at the meeting. It was decided that every Tuesday Swami Bodhananda would come from the Belur Math to teach the *Gita*.

The Women's Section was opened on November 2, 1903. The time fixed for the school was between the hours of 12 and 4 in the afternoon when ladies, free from their household duties, had leisure to attend the school The help of Labanyaprabha Bose, sister of Dr. J. C. Bose, was secured for teaching reading and writing; Jogin-Ma agreed to take classes on religion and Christine took upon herself the task of teaching sewing and needlework twice a week.

The report of the opening of this Women's Section and the meeting were duly reported in the Bengali monthly *Udbodhan* published by the Ramakrishna Math.

In the same month a *Chandi-Purana-Katha* was arranged in the school courtyard which could accommodate the ladies who attended it in large numbers. Their eager enthusiasm proved beyond doubt that the ground was ready for such a work. The school report of this period mentions how the ladies tried to finish their household duties early in order to attend the school in time, and how they behaved as amiably as they could in the family and did double the amount of household work so that they would not be prevented from going to school. A new vista had opened in the lives of these young women and they had eagerly followed it up.

The Sisters were themselves surprised at the success of

their new experiment. Gladly did Nivedita one day write to Miss MacLeod: "It is unheard of that married Zenana ladies should leave their homes and come to lessons at the house of a European. But they do it, and there never was a moment's difficulty."

The main reason for this 'unheard of' occurrence was that the simple lives and attitude of the Sisters had removed the suspicions of the orthodox people of Baghbazar against foreigners Till that day, the foreigners who worked in the field of education were the Christian missionaries and their proselytising activities had prejudiced the self-respecting Hindus. But the Sisters had followed to the letter the Swami's ideal not to teach against the aspirations of the taught and this had made their work easier.

An Englishman who was an eye-witness to the work carried on by the Sisters rightly emphasised this point when he said:

> Beginning as a tiny kindergarten, the school grew steadily until it had a large attendance of little Hindu girls up to the marriageable age, and a still larger number of married women and widows. As conducted by Sister Nivedita and her colleague, the school involved no uprooting from familiar surroundings. Neither child nor woman was taken from her home into a foreign world; her schooling demanded only a daily migration from one home to another in the same lane or ward. The principle was, as Sister Nivedita herself expressed it, by means of familiar factors of her daily life so to educate the Indian girl as to enable her to realise those ends which are themselves integral aspirations of that life. There was no attempt to convert her to any religious or social system alien from her own; but rather, by means of her own customs and traditions, to develop her in harmony with Indian ideals, the teachers themselves following those ideals as far as they could be made practicable.

The success of the Women's Section was due to Christine's faithfulness and initiative and Nivedita was not slow to admire her for her work and achievements. Referring to her, she wrote: "The women's work is a wonderful success. But *she*

is more wonderful. Her whole time is given up to study, work and visiting. She lives here, without fuss, without complexity. I look at her and feel that I never knew my own measureless inadequacy before."

As the students in both the Children's School and the Women's Section increased, it was found impossible to carry on work in one building at 17 Bosepara Lane. And, therefore, the old house at No. 16 was rented. Though quite adjacent, from the front door of this house to the front door of No. 16 was an immense distance across the two houses; No. 16 was kept entirely for work. It was the same house that Nivedita occupied when she first settled in Baghbazar in 1897. Classes were held in the outer rooms. In the two large rooms upstairs, Christine had her sewing classes and in Nivedita's old bedroom she slept. Nivedita and her maidservant stayed at No. 17.

Nivedita taught sewing and needlework to school girls and conducted teachers' training classes for the senior girls and the school itself was for them to practise in. The work of the school began everyday with the mass chanting of Sanskrit prayers and 'Bande Mataram' in front of a decorated picture of Sri Ramakrishna. Whenever the Holy Mother was in Calcutta at the opening of a new session, she visited the school and added to the joy and enthusiasm of the teachers as well as the taught.

The school was not known by any particular name then. In her project for the school Nivedita called it the 'Ramakrishna School for Girls'. Some Western friends called it the 'Vivekananda School' and the people of the locality referred to it as the 'Nivedita School'. After the death of Nivedita, when the school was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission in 1918, it was given its present name 'Ramakrishna Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School'.

It may be mentioned here that being an idealist, Nivedita was not content to conduct a school like this only. She dreamt of its being the nucleus of a grand educational movement. The Government's stiff attitude in officializing all education and in consequence disaffiliating all national institutions did not dishearten her, but gave her fresh impetus to make further plans.

One of her plans was to make her school the centre of a University Settlement. She proposed to invite selected people, both men and women, Indians as well as foreigners, as workers and train them. These workers would in future promote the cause of national education even in the face of Government's opposition The plan was unfortunately never carried out.

Another idea that simultaneously grew up in her mind was to start a Boys' Home. The boys would stay in the Home for six months to study and spend the other six months going round the country. This, she said, would create in them love and knowledge of the country and they would be ultimately trained into a new kind of monks, dedicating themselves to the service of the country. All this was to be done keeping in view the Swami's ideas. For this purpose, she proposed to rent a building in Baghbazar. She did not worry about money. "The power that created the Swami must find me money. I am bubbling over with the thing," she confided to Miss MacLeod.

A Home was not immediately started; but the second idea of taking the boys out to see the country was carried out In April 1903, a group of boys of the Vivekananda Home were taken on a pilgrimage to the Pindari Glacier by Swami Sadananda. Rabindranath Tagore sent his young son Rathindranath with the group.

A similar tour programme was arranged the next year. But the project could not be continued in later years due to paucity of funds.

Overwhelmed though Nivedita was by numberless difficulties, she was undaunted. Her task was to rouse the nation by disseminating the Swami's ideas and this she continued to do. The consciousness of her own powers as a speaker and writer had grown in her mind and she did not spare herself when she was called either to speak or to write. Her extensive lecture tours outside Bengal and her heavy lecture programme in Calcutta kept her busy. She once desired to start a magazine but could not. However, her pen was always in demand and as far as possible she yielded to the requests of the numerous newspapers and magazines. Her contributions were regularly published in the following Indian papers and magazines: *New India*, *Dawn*, *Indian Review*, *Modern Review*, *Prabuddha*

Bharata, *Hindu Review*, *Mysore Review*, *Behar Herald*, *The Bangalee*, *East and West*, *Sindh Journal*, *Hindu*, *Balbharati*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Statesman*, *Advocate*, *Tribune*, *Maratha*, *Times of India* and *Bombay Chronicle*.

34. Patna and Lucknow

On January 9, 1904, the Swami's birthday was observed at the Belur Math and Nivedita spent the whole day there. On the following Sunday was the public celebration and Nivedita addressed the meeting held on the Math grounds. On January 17, she again spoke on Swami Vivekananda at the Vivekananda Memorial Home. Swami Saradananda presided over the meeting.

On the night of the 20th of the same month, she left for Patna. Swami Sadananda and Swami Sankarananda were with her. One night, Swami Sadananda arranged a magic lantern lecture on Japan for ladies and Swami Sankarananda was the lecturer. The ladies who attended were very enthusiastic about it and many of them requested Nivedita to arrange such lectures in their homes. Nivedita was happy to notice the genuine interest of the ladies.

During her four days' stay, Nivedita delivered public lectures and held informal discussions which were highly interesting and edifying.

On the 22nd, members of the Hindu Boys' Association at Patna celebrated its anniversary with great éclat on the auspicious day of the Saraswati Puja. The spacious hall of the Anglo-Sanskrit School was crowded to suffocation. Nivedita was invited to speak on the occasion. Prof. Jadunath Sarkar introduced her as one of the greatest religious thinkers of the day.

Addressing the audience, Nivedita said that the students should always ask themselves what India expected of them. She laid stress on the necessity of physical training and said that manhood was the secret of life She urged the boys to remember that "The good of your country should be your true aim Don't seek it by literary pursuits or clever writing of articles, or oratory. There are too many among you who are fit for these things. Think that the whole country is your

country and your country needs work. Struggle for knowledge, for strength, for happiness and prosperity. Let all these be your aim in life. By no means be found sleeping when the cry comes for battle."

The lecture was well received and the *Behar Herald* reporting it the next day said, "Her stirring and remarkable speech would rouse into activity the most lethargic of her audience."

The following day she addressed another public meeting on 'The Educational Problem in India'. She described the problem of education as the problem of problems. She asked the people over and over again not to depend on Government's help, but to think for themselves.

"My object is to make you think and think. . . . I can point out to you the lines along which we can make experiments, but I am unable to give you anything cut and dried . . . It is for you to determine the aims and functions of education." She spoke at great length on women's education. "Your ladies must be educated. But the education of boys will be in a national sense; that of your girls must be in a civic sense. Your women are the finest in the world; they are not fools as you think them to be. . . . Their education need not be English. But it must be such that they may share in your thoughts, hopes and aspirations." She urged the students to remember the goal of Independence they ought to attain. Unity was the basis of strength and so she emphasized the need of bringing about unity among the sons of the motherland, irrespective of caste and creed.

A third lecture was given on Sunday, January 24, on 'Swami Vivekananda's Mission'. Beginning with his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, she ended with his work in the West. In conclusion she said: "His mission to you, his own countrymen, is what you have the strength to make it. His mission depends upon your activity, faith and understanding and, above all, your courage. Fail not in courage. May the blessing of the Great Mother be upon you; may you be drunk with strength and energy to unite together in bonds of brotherhood, bonds stronger than iron ores."

There was a general regret when the time for her departure came. The *Behar Herald*, echoing the sentiments of the people, said: "India, and especially this province of Behar, needs

at the present day such a preacher as this whose mission, as she emphatically and eloquently puts it, is not to initiate people into the mysteries of Yoga, or to solve abstruse metaphysical questions of Hindu religion, but to suggest practical means for the real advancement of Indians as a nation."

After a brief visit to Rajgir, Nalanda, Bodh Gaya and Banaras, she reached Lucknow on January 30. She stayed there till February 4, and lectured on the following subjects: 'The Problem of To-day', 'Education', 'Bodh Gaya: Its Place in Hinduism' and 'Islam in India'.

The question of Hindu-Muslim unity was uppermost in the minds of the leaders then, and Nivedita was eager as others to see that Hindus and Muslims united for a common cause. She impressed upon the people to forget their social and religious dissensions and to embrace each other as the sons of the same mother irrespective of their caste or creed In a country like India which was inhabited by the representatives of every creed, unity in religion was not possible, but tolerance was necessary, and a step further, love for each other.

After the completion of this successful lecture-tour, Nivedita returned to Calcutta on February 6. But even after strenuous touring and a heavy lecturing programme, she could not rest. In the next few weeks she had to address the public on five occasions.

On February 16, she gave a talk on 'Bodh Gaya'. On the 22nd, she spoke in a debate on 'Celibacy vs. Matrimony' which was arranged at the Dalhousie Institute as an anniversary treat by the Committee of the Chaitanya Library and the Beadon Square Literary Club. On Friday, 26th, a public lecture on 'Dynamic Religion' was arranged at the Town Hall. On March 20, a lecture on 'Islam in Asia' at the Corinthian Theatre was organized by the Calcutta Madrassa, and on April 1, she spoke a second time on 'Bodh Gaya' at the Classic Theatre.

The debate on 'Celibacy vs. Matrimony' was opened by Sir Edward Law, the then Finance Minister, with some humorous remarks, speaking of course, strongly in favour of the holy estate. Mr. Badshah, Mr. B. L. Gupta, Dr. Bhandarkar and Mr. M. N. Ghosh made interesting contributions to

the discussion, each giving a brief exposition of the various aspects of the Hindu idea of marriage as both a religious sacrament and a social institution. These ideas were further developed by Nivedita in a speech, remarkable for its clarity and force. A journalist who was amongst the audience summed up his report by referring to Nivedita's speech thus:

"It was marvellously skilful, complete and convincing, and the whole thing occupied a bare ten minutes. But what interested one even more than the perfection of the speech was the way in which the tone of the meeting was transformed by the touchstone of her dominating spirit."

Nivedita's lecture on 'Dynamic Religion' at the Town Hall was largely attended. Beginning with a brief retrospect of the chief movements among the people of India during the last one hundred years, she spoke about the great culture, the great tradition, the great genius for ideas, and the great conception of spiritual freedom, which was the imperishable heritage of the Indian people. She emphasized the need for a nationalized education and ended by saying that it depended upon the women of India to realize the Dynamic Religion, the religion of nationality.

On March 20, Nivedita lectured to an audience chiefly composed of Mahomedans on the subject of 'Islam in Asia'. She ended her thoughtful lecture by appealing to the Indian Mussalmans to serve India with their life-blood.

> The Muslim, too, carried with him a great force of national cohesion, which made him a developing influence wherever he went, but in the centuries after the culmination of the conquest Islam had in a measure failed in the national sense. What then was the duty of the Indian Mussalman today? It was not to relate himself to Arabia. He had no need of that; his relation to Arabia was of his very life-blood; it had been accomplished for him by the faith and patient labour of his forefathers. No; his duty was to relate himself to India, to throw into the national idea of India—his home by blood or by adoption and hospitality—the mighty force that was theirs by reason of the heritage into which they had been born.

All these lectures by Nivedita were duly announced and reported in the local newspapers.

In March she was invited to Banaras. There she spoke on three occasions on the following subjects, 'Religion and the Future', 'Civic Life', and 'Educational Problems'.

During the summer, both Nivedita and Christine went to Mayavati at Mrs. Sevier's invitation. Dr. J. C. Bose, his wife and his sister accompanied them. On May 17, in Mayavati, Dr. Bose began writing his famous book, *Plant Response,* and on June 23, they returned to Calcutta.

In her diary are noted many more talks and lectures, delivered by her at different places in the months that followed: 'Theory of Education', 'Education' and 'Teaching of History' at the Bethune College; 'Ellora', 'Conjeevaram' and 'Bodh Gaya' at Dr. Bose's house; 'Nationality' at the Dawn Society; and two talks on 'Indian Art' at the School of Arts.

Thus throughout the year 1904, Nivedita travelled far and wide in India constantly lecturing and trying to arouse in the listeners the consciousness of their culture, tradition and nationality.

35. *The Holy Land of Buddha*

NIVEDITA'S VISIT to Patna had drawn her mind towards the places associated with Buddha. For Bankipore stood on the site of ancient Pataliputra, the place from where Buddha entered the kingdom of Magadha.

It has already been said that the life and teachings of Buddha had strongly influenced Nivedita's mind even prior to her meeting Swami Vivekananda in London. Later, her Guru's reverence for Buddha augmented her devotion. She never forgot how her day of consecration culminated in an offering of flowers at the feet of Buddha when her Guru gave the final injunction, "Go thou and follow Him, who was born and gave His life for others FIVE HUNDRED TIMES, before He attained the vision of the Buddha!" And now treading the earth which was made sacred long, long ago by the feet of Buddha, her joy knew no bounds. She collected relics and dust of those sanctified spots as invaluable treasures

Having gone as far as Patna, she did not wish to return without visiting other places associated with Buddha, namely, Rajgir, Nalanda, Sarnath and Bodh Gaya.

After the completion of her lecture programme in Patna she left for Rajgir via Bakhtiarpur. She stayed there for some days and roamed over that ancient hill which had been so graphically described by Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsiang. She visited Nalanda riding on an elephant and saw everything worth seeing in one day. On the 27th she left for Bodh Gaya with her companions. As Rajgir was not on the rail line then, they had to walk a distance of eleven miles at night to reach Tilaya Station and entrain for Bodh Gaya.

At Bodh Gaya they were guests of the Mahanta On return she wrote to Miss MacLeod:

"I have been to Bodh Gaya, have been the guest of the Mahanta and have seen the temple and the tree. How was

it that you did not tell me about it? Can it be that you do not realize that this is the most important spot in India? It is the heart of the future."

During that time Bodh Gaya featured prominently in the newspapers because a controversy was started by the Buddhists that the temple should belong to them. This led Nivedita to speak and write in the following months about Bodh Gaya and its place in the Hindu religion.

Nivedita supported the view that Buddhism was not a religion separate from or antagonistic to Hinduism but it was only one of the sects out of the many that were sheltered in the capacious bosom of the Hindu society. Buddha was only a great Hindu teacher, higher and holier than his contemporary Sadhus. His followers lived in the fold of Hindu society; they regarded themselves not as a new sect, but as Hindus of a purer life and more earnest faith than their neighbours. She compared them to the followers of Ramakrishna who have not seceded from Hindu society, but live in it; only they hold their Guru higher than the Sadhus and teachers of the age.

She pointedly asked:

> If I write the story of my Master's life and teachings, I shall naturally make little mention of the Vaishnavas in it; I shall speak of Chaitanya slightingly in comparison with my Master, whom I shall naturally describe as the greatest sage of the age. But will a later historian be justified in inferring from my book that Ramakrishna's lay followers formed a caste apart from the Vaishnavas, or that they ousted the followers of Chaitanya from Hindu society and cruelly did them to death?"

According to her, Buddhism was India's greatest gift to the outer world and hence there was the supreme need for its revival.

In her lecture on 'Bodh Gaya: Its Place in Hinduism' she emphasized the same point that Buddhism was an essential part of Hinduism. "Hinduism is a synthesis, not a sect, a spiritual university, not a spiritual church, and of this synthesis Buddhism is an inalienable part." Regarding the place

of Bodh Gaya in Hinduism she had long talks with the Mahanta and learnt from him that the Order of monks was placed in charge of the temple by Sankaracharya himself. "A curious commentary this on the European idea of the Buddhist persecutor!" wrote Nivedita. "The position of the monks was therefore a religious trust, enjoined by the Guru. In course of ages the trust lapsed. But in the middle of the seventeenth century, a Sannyasin of the line returned to Bodh Gaya in order to take up the trust once more He and his successors appear to have done their utmost to bring order into the place. They had not the resources of a great government, but they recovered many of the scattered sculptures and built them into their walls and the time came when they were able to extend their welcome to archaeologists and repairers who could execute more fully what had originally been their wish and plan . . Bodh Gaya must be held for the synthesis known as Hinduism. It must never become the plaything of sects." Her views were published in almost all the Indian newspapers.

When she returned to Calcutta Swami Brahmananda suggested to her to start a School of History at Bodh Gaya with a group of young men. She desired to make it into a sort of College—post-university extension—and hoped to be able to work out her thought there. But the plan did not materialize.

In October of the same year Nivedita went for a week to Bodh Gaya a third time. This time her party included Dr. J. C. Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Sankarananda, Sir Jadunath Sarkar and Mr Mathuranath Sinha of Patna. They were all lodged in the Mahanta's guest house.

From the recollections of Sir Jadunath Sarkar and some other members of the party, it has been gathered how this group of prominent men passed their time with Nivedita, in this place of pilgrimage, recapturing the spirit of the past

There were daily readings by Nivedita from Warren Hastings's *Buddhism* and occasionally from Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*. Her deep and varied tone betrayed how the subject of Buddha's life and work possessed her. Sometimes songs and recitations by the poet Rabindranath enthralled

them. During the day they strolled through the temple enclosure, or visited the neighbouring villages. In the evening twilight they went to the Bodhi Tree and sat in silent meditation. Here they found a poor Japanese fisherman, Fuji, who had by hard austerity for many years saved money to gratify his life's dream of making a pilgrimage to the spot where Buddha had attained Enlightenment. He had at last come here and lived in a room of the pilgrims' house. Every evening he would come and sit under the Bodhi Tree, praying and chanting the hymn:

> Namo-namo Buddha Divākarāya
> Namo-namo Gotama-Chandrikāya,
> Namo-namo Ananta-guna-narāya,
> Namo-namo Sākya-nandanāya.

In the silence the sound of the words of the hymn uttered with a Japanese accent, rose like the tolling of a low bell, and it made them feel as if they were overpowered by the spirit of the place

One evening, Nivedita sat with her friends long in the shade of the temple. She seemed to be entering into the spirit of the past. After a while, she spoke of the Buddhistic age with a wonderful intuitive perception of historic truth. Everybody listened to her with rapt attention.

Another evening, at her suggestion, they visited the site of Sujata's house, in the village Urbel, the Uru-villa of the Buddha's days. There was no relic or ruin there, only the bare ground. But Nivedita was in raptures. She took a clod of earth from the field and held it reverently to her heart, saying "The whole ground is hallowed. Sujata was the type of the true house-mistress, she did the duty of nourishing the world's teacher." Then she quoted Swami Vivekananda's saying that it was not a pure waste that fifty-two lakhs of Sadhus were maintained by the pious house-holders of India, for out of this idle fraternity, once in a while, a Ramakrishna comes out, under no other social system could his advent have been possible.

At the time of leaving Bodh Gaya, Nivedita broke down and wept all night in her room saying, "We have failed.

The country has not been roused from its slumber; it has not come back to life. We have been able to do almost nothing. The true spirit of India,—what once made India the glory of the world and the heart of Asia, has not been revived. When will the nation be conscious of its glorious heritage, and the distinct place it once occupied in the growth of human thought and human civilization? When will that life, that spirit, return?"

36. *Political Stirrings*

THE FIRST DECADE of the twentieth century may be called an epoch-making period in Indian history. With the first political stirrings in the country, the British Government, headed by Lord Curzon, adopted strong measures to check the forces of nationalism. But ironically enough, it intensified the desire of the people for political advancement and in some instances stirred the patriotic feelings of the people to their very depths.

It has been necessary to introduce the political events of the period in this narrative because they brought about a change in the life and work of Nivedita.

It has been said already that due to her political leanings Nivedita preferred to resign from the purely spiritual Order of Sri Ramakrishna rather than violate its rules and regulations. Her letters since 1900 show her growing interest in the political destiny of India. The Swami had said in 1897: "For the next fifty years this alone shall be our key-note—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain Gods disappear for that time from our minds. This is the only God that is awake ...When we have worshipped this, we shall be able to worship all other Gods." Nivedita's work during the following ten years show how India and her future became her chief concern. Another fact that explains her active work during these years was her stay in Calcutta, which was the seat of the Government then and which witnessed the beginnings of a great national movement. Nivedita could neither sit idle nor remain indifferent during this period of unrest and turmoil.

It cannot be denied that she brought the full force of her intellectual and moral powers to bear upon the national movement. But unfortunately for us, much fiction, with no foundation in actual facts, is woven into the accounts that describe her political activity. Many books and articles on that period have now been written. Unable on the one hand

to omit her name as one of the leading figures of the times, and on the other hand, not being able to evaluate her contribution in the work, attempts have been made to picture her variously as an adventuress, a glorified heroine, a secret political agent or a terrorist. These misrepresentations do injustice to her memory. In order to give a correct estimate of her personality and work, a short retrospect of the important events is necessary.

During 1900-1905 the voice of educated India was heard through the leaders of the Congress. By petitions and protests the Congress leaders tried to create a better state of things. When the Delhi Durbar was to be held in 1902, the Congress held its sessions a few days earlier at Ahmedabad as a counter-attraction and a counter-influence. It echoed the opinion of the country that the Durbar was only a wasteful expenditure, a vain show. The English papers in Bengal criticized everything about the Durbar in vitriolic language even at the risk of persecution.

Nivedita was then touring the Madras Presidency. On her return to Calcutta she asked the son of an official how things fared at the Durbar. He replied. "Our impression is that all our princes have been humiliated in an extreme degree." This made Nivedita remark: "So India *has* gained in twenty-five years since the last Durbar a good deal of political penetration."

The other event of the year that evoked much protest from different quarters of India was the Universities Commission. Lord Curzon had called an educational conference at Simla in 1901, which was followed by the appointment of the Universities Commission in 1902. On the basis of the Commission a Universities Act was passed in 1904. From one end of the country to the other, educated people protested against its illiberal provisions. Referring to it, the eminent educationist and Congress leader Mr. Surendranath Banerjee wrote: "Of the many disservices which Lord Curzon had done to India, his so-called reform of the universities was the most far-reaching in its consequences. Under the plea of efficiency he had officialized the Calcutta Municipality; under the same plea he now proceeded to officialize the universities, and to bring the entire system of higher

education under the control of Government. Efficiency was his watchword; popular sentiment counted for nothing, and in his mad worship of this fetish Lord Curzon set popular opinion at open defiance."*

About the Commission Nivedita indignantly wrote in a letter what she felt:

> We have had a Universities Commission lately, which has done its very best to kill all education, and especially all science education. This is *the* point in India's wrongs that fires me, the right of India to be India, the right of India to think for herself, the right of India to *knowledge*. Were this not the great grievance I might be fired by her right to bread, to justice, to other things, but this outweighs all."

Having been an educationist herself, she naturally felt a deep interest in the educational problem. When the Universities Act was before the Legislative Council in 1904, Nivedita was touring Behar and the United Provinces. She spoke on the educational problems in India more than once, calling it the problem of problems. Not being a politician, she did not make a capital grievance out of it. Nor did her indignation lead her to criticize and complain only. A constructive thinker and worker that she was, she urged the people to rise to the occasion, face the situation squarely and grasp the opportunity to promote national education, instead of looking up to the Government for help.

With her characteristic vigour, incisive logic and earnestness she said during a lecture at Bankipore:

> The educational policy which is now being followed gives anything but University education. The Indian Universities Bill attempts to narrow the sphere of education in this country. But I am not going to make a political speech. My object is to make you think and think. I am ceaselessly thinking on the educational problem. Sometimes, I find a way out and sometimes I do not. I have come here to help you in thinking out for

* *A Nation in Making*, p 174

> yourself, for I have a belief in the power of right thought. . . .
>
> The educational problem is one of national life, and so one ignorant of your national life cannot contribute in any way to your wants. A foreigner can do so only when he acts with a correct ideal of national life and adjusts his deeds to the influences of the times. A foreigner cannot help you and you must help yourselves. . . .
>
> It is for you to do and you should not crouch before the Government like monkeys to get done by the Government what you ought to do for yourself . . . You must look at the educational policy of the Government in a different attitude. By the Bill before the Legislative Council many of the schools are to be disaffiliated and then will come your turn to sweep out the hypnotism out of the past. . . .You must be grateful to Government for the threatened disaffiliation of the schools as such disaffiliation will allow you much freedom of thought. But you must not sit back and thank the Government. You must work, work and work and remake the meaning of Education.

Commenting on the lecture the next day the *Behar Herald* wrote: "We wish there were more persons amongst us of the type of Sister Nivedita to rebuke and chide us as she has done and for which she can but have our sincere gratitude."

The Congress was the spokesman of the public sentiment in 1902 but gradually some leading members of the society felt the need of mobilizing the energies of the young men for national work and their public activities took a new direction. Under their guidance numerous associations and groups such as 'The Young Men's Hindu Union Committee', 'The Gita Society', 'The Dawn Society', 'The Anusilan Samity' and 'The Vivekananda Society' were formed. Nivedita who had faith in the social and spiritual renaissance of the Indian people, readily associated herself with these societies. Whenever she was invited, she went and talked on Hinduism and read and explained the *Gita* or Swami Vivekananda's works. Her talks were inspiring. She had so long thought about the problems of India that now her ideas became a living power

which opened out new horizons for the young. She used and repeated the words 'nation' and 'nationality' as a Mantra; it was she who coined the word 'national-consciousness'. She encouraged them to arrange for sports and recitation and lecture competitions and on special occasions awarded Vivekananda Medals for merit. The young men always clustered round her for inspiration and guidance. She was a 'Guru' to them.

Among the above mentioned societies the 'Dawn Society' and the 'Anusilan Samity' wielded a great influence over a large number of people. The 'Dawn Society' was started by Mr. Satis Chandra Mukherjee and it did much work in fostering and popularizing the idea of national education. It was under its auspices that the National Education Society was founded in 1905, and the National College was started. People of social standing like Mr. Brojendranath Seal, Rabindranath Tagore, Mr. Surendranath Banerjee, Sister Nivedita, Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal, Mr. Abdul Rasul and others were brought together in its all-embracing national programme. Mr. Benoy Sarkar, then a young man, but later a noted economist, said that he first saw Nivedita in 1904 at the Dawn Society and was surprised to see how a foreigner could have nothing but India's interest in her mind. She was a real 'Sister' to them. She spoke to them about India's independence. Her rebukes were strong and bitter and she was able to rouse the sentiments of patriotism and national service in the young.

The 'Anusilan Samity' was organized by Mr. Satis Bhusan Roy Chowdhury. Mr. P. Mitra, a well-known barrister, was one of its active workers. Among other noted leaders who either associated themselves with its activities or helped it were Mr. C R. Das, Mr. Suren Halder, Mr. H. D. Basu, Mr. Rashbehari Ghosh, Justice Sarda Charan Mitra, Rabindranath Tagore and Sister Nivedita.

Gymnasiums were conducted by these societies for giving physical training to the young; study circles were organized where the lives and teachings of great men were read and histories of the struggle for freedom of the different countries, politics, and economics were studied. Classes on moral instructions were held on Sundays where the national epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita*, the *Chandi* and

the Swami's works were expounded. Swami Saradananda, Mr. Satya Charan Sastri and Brahambandhab Upadhyay gave instructions on spiritual practices. Thus organized efforts were made to develop the physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual powers of the young.

A new line of thought and action was, however, introduced into these activities by Sri Aurobindo Ghosh when he sent an emissary from Baroda in 1902. He never liked the timid constitutional agitations of the Congress. For the first few years he was in India he abstained from any political activity, except writing articles in *Indu Prakash* in which he vehemently denounced the Congress policies. The editor of the *Indu Prakash* was warned by a Moderate leader and he persuaded Sri Aurobindo not to write such articles.

But his ideas were clear. He wanted to start a revolutionary propaganda and organization of which the main object was the preparation of an armed insurrection, and secondly, he advocated public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the idea of independence. Thirdly, he wanted to organize the people to carry on public and united opposition and undermine foreign rule. When his emissary, Mr. Jatindranath Banerjee, a soldier in the Baroda Army, came to Calcutta, with this programme of preparation and action, the young men who had joined various associations without any clear idea or any settled programme began to turn in this direction. Slowly the active societies were won over for revolutionary purposes.

The cultural and other programmes remained ostensible objects of the societies while more training was given in activities such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organized movement. In military uniform Jatindranath rode horses on public roads and asked the boys to follow suit. A Riding Club was organized by two young members, Mr. Manmatha Chatterjee and Mr. Debabrata Basu.

Sri Aurobindo knew about the existence of the societies and planned to organize them into one party. To quote his words: "I found a number of small groups of revolutionaries that had recently sprung into existence, but all scattered and acting without reference to each other. I tried to unite them under a single organisation with the barrister P. Mitra as

the leader of the revolution in Bengal and a Central Council of five persons, one of them being Nivedita."*

This idea of close association between different societies did not succeed; for, the Council ceased to exist during Sri Aurobindo's absence at Baroda. It was found impossible to keep up agreement among the many groups. The Committee which actually took up the programme of Sri Aurobindo was the 'Anusilan Samity'. Nivedita often visited it and addressed its young members. As a member of the short-lived Central Committee of which Mr. P. Mitra was the President, Mr. C. R. Das and Sri Aurobindo were Vice-presidents and Mr. Surendranath Tagore treasurer, Nivedita had come in contact with some of its active members. She gave her collection of books on the Irish Revolution, the History of Mutiny, the American Wars of Independence, the History of the Dutch Republic, the Lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi, and books on economics written by Mr. R. C. Dutt, Mr. Dadabhoy Naoroji, Mr. Digby and others to the Samity.

Nivedita did not believe that non-cooperation and passive resistance could be the sole means of achieving independence. Therefore, she supported Sri Aurobindo's move for maintaining secret revolutionary activity as a preparation for open revolt in case passive resistance failed. Her collaboration, however, was only limited to presenting books to the Society and giving inspiring lectures to the young men to instil national fervour into them. Addressing the Hindu Boys' Association at Patna she said: "It is the duty of boys to be young heroes. Think that the whole country is your country and your country needs work. Struggle for knowledge, for strength, for happiness and prosperity. Let all these be your aims in life. But by no means be found sleeping when the cry comes for battle."

Nivedita's acquaintance with Sri Aurobindo and her approval of his method of work have given rise to fantastic accounts of their close association in the revolutionary work. For instance, Mr. Girijashankar Roy Chowdhury in his book on Sri Aurobindo says at more than one place that it would not be wrong to call Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary party Sister Nivedita's party; and further, that Sister Nivedita conducted the

* *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, p. 116

working of the secret revolutionary party because she knew the technique of it and not Sri Aurobindo.*

He quotes for his authority the biography of Sister Nivedita written in French by Mdme. Lizelle Reymond. But the accounts given in the said book are groundless and have been contradicted and corrected by Sri Aurobindo himself. "I had no occasion to meet Nivedita after that until I settled in Bengal as Principal of the National College and the chief editorial writer of the *Bande Mataram*. . . . I was busy with my work and she with hers, and no occasion arose for consultations or decisions about the conduct of the revolutionary movement."†

As a matter of fact, Nivedita was friendly not only with Sri Aurobindo but with all who thought and worked for the independence of India. Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal, the Extremist leader was her friend and she frequently contributed articles to his *Indian Review*. The Moderate leaders, Mr. R. C. Dutt and Mr. G. K. Gokhale were equally on friendly terms with her. Both held liberal views and though Nivedita's radical outlook did not tally with theirs, she was none the less interested in their work and views. Mr. R. C. Dutt was a minister in the Baroda State. He wrote letters to her in which he told her about the new policies and reforms he wished to introduce in the State. His plans included relieving the agriculturists of excessive taxation on the land, endeavouring to get together the capitalists to start new mills and industries and to build up the Legislative Council. Nivedita took great interest in his plans. Mr. Gokhale came to 17 Bosepara Lane day after day when he stayed in Calcutta and had long discussions with her on various topics of national interest.

Thus Nivedita simultaneously took interest in the different ideologies professed by leaders of the Indian Community. The emergence of India as a strong and powerful nation was the supreme goal towards which she wanted to see the country progress, she was not interested in the method. Speaking of her own contribution in this great work of national awakening, she said in no uncertain terms:

Let me plough my furrow across India just as deep, deep,

* *Sri Aurobindo*, p 532 f, p 726

† *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, p 116 f

deep, to the very centre of things, as it will go. Let it be either as a hidden voice sending out noiseless things from a cell or as a personality, romping and raging through the big cities—I don't care! But the God of my own strong right hand grant that I do not have to waste my effervescence in Western futilities. I think that I would rather commit suicide! India is the starting point, and the goal, as far as I am concerned. Let *her* look after the West if she wishes.

37. *Partition and After*

In one of her lectures Nivedita said: "Young India is getting ready to run the race in the field of freedom. It has not as yet started the race." This was an apt remark; for during these years of ferment and unrest nothing definite was done or achieved. The only positive gain was that a feeling of 'national-consciousness' had grown in the people and they were ready to face and fight all wrongs.

In the beginning of the year 1905, on one more occasion, Lord Curzon roused the anger of the people. As Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, Lord Curzon said in his convocation address on February 11, 1905, that truth took a higher place in the moral codes of the West before it had been similarly honoured in the East. This aspersion cast on the Indians hurt the educated Indians attending the convocation, but no one protested. After Lord Curzon left the hall, Sir Gurudas Banerjee and others collected at the Senate Hall gates and discussed about it. Nivedita, equally furious, joined them. She asked whether any of them had Lord Curzon's book *Problems of the Far East*. Having got the book from Sir Gurudas Banerjee she sent to the press the next day the following writing in which along with a few lines from Lord Curzon's speech was quoted an extract from his own book. It was published in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on February 13, and was reproduced by *The Statesman* the following day, thus:

Lord Curzon in Various Capacities

As Chancellor of the University of Calcutta: Address in Convocation, February 11, 1905:

> Untruthfulness consists in saying or doing anything that gives an erroneous impression either of one's own character or of other people's conduct or the facts and incidents of life.

I say that the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a Western conception.
Undoubtedly, truth took a high place in the moral codes of the West before it had been similarly honoured in the East.
Flattery may be either honest or dishonest. Whichever it be, you should avoid it. If it is the former, it is nevertheless false, if it is the latter, it is vile.

From *Problems of the Far East* by George N. Curzon, pp. 155-65:

Before proceeding to the royal audience, I enjoyed an interview with the President of the Korean Foreign Office.
I remember some of his questions and answers. Having been particularly warned not to admit to him that I was only 32 years old, an age to which no respect attaches in Korea, when he put to me the straight question (invariably the first in an Oriental dialogue) "How old are you?" I unhesitatingly responded "Forty".
"Dear me," he said, "you look very young for that. How do you account for it?"
"By the fact," I replied, "that I have been travelling for a month in a superb climate of His Majesty's dominions."
Finally he said to me, "I presume you are a near relative of Her Majesty, the Queen of England." "No," I replied, "I am not." But observing the look of disgust that passed over his countenance, I was fain to add, "I am, however, as yet an unmarried man", with which unscrupulous suggestion I completely regained the old gentleman's favour.

It must be added that this latter passage, containing the interview of Lord Curzon with the President of the Korean Foreign Office has been discreetly omitted from the last edition of *Problems of the Far East* !

This delightful comment on Lord Curzon's insulting remark was highly enjoyed by the public.

Another paper giving the interesting news-item remarked:

> But the Convocation play would not have been complete without the delicious little comedy which wound up the entertainment. How His Excellency must have grinned when next day he saw the pictures which our smart contemporary, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* held up before his gaze, depicting 'The Chancellor in Convocation' side by side with 'Lord Curzon in Korea'. The pure fun which these two pictures have given in India and will ere long give in England was worth the whole performance. And the beauty of it was that the actor was quite unconscious of the well of pure delight he was giving to the people.

Except a few intimate friends of Nivedita no one knew who wrote it. Dr. J. C. Bose on seeing it wrote to her: "Personally I feel much strengthened by the thought that many illusions which blind our men will now end. I do not wish that they should find out who wrote the article. The thunderbolt should always be behind dark clouds and they should not know from what part of the heavens the weapon is hurled."

Nivedita did not rest content with this. She wrote another open letter addressed to the editor of *The Statesman* which was published on February 14. It was captioned 'The Highest Ideal of Truth'.

She began with the remarks:

> On Saturday last, for the first time, it was authoritatively explained to India why Professor Max Muller thought it necessary to devote the second chapter of his book on *What India Has to Teach Us* to the subject of 'The Truthful Character of the Hindus'.

Nor did Nivedita spare the audience.

> There is, however, another, and to Indians a more important element in the situation. The students to whom these statements were addressed, received them in 'a faultless silence'. They did well, less well, however, must

> we think it, if they stepped into manhood, remembering charges so levelled at their dead ancestors and their national codes, with never a word offered in defence!

On March 11, a mammoth mass meeting was held at the Town Hall with Dr. Rashbehari Ghosh in the chair in protest against the Viceroy's Convocation address.

On March 13, Nivedita fell seriously ill. The doctors diagnosed it to be a case of meningitis. A nurse had to be engaged for her. In the first week of May she left with the Boses for Darjeeling to recuperate her lost health. On July 3, the party returned to Calcutta. Nothing eventful happened during these three months.

But the year 1905 became memorable in the history of India because of the Partition of Bengal planned by Lord Curzon. Even his supporters have held that he did an incalculable disservice to British rule by forcing the Partition against the people's feelings. The announcement was made on July 20, and it shocked the people. The Congress leaders felt insulted, humiliated and tricked. They lost no time in taking action. On August 7, a protest meeting was organized at the Town Hall. Nivedita noted in her diary that day—'Partition of Bengal meeting. The black shadow.' She attended the meeting but did not speak. Successive meetings were held in the following weeks and the people were getting ready for direct action.

At one such meeting, Mr. Surendranath Banerjee proposed to raise a Federation Hall as a symbolic protest against the Partition, for it would serve to be a meeting place of the old province with its severed parts. He wrote later: "The proposal was carefully considered, and it was warmly supported by the late Sir Taraknath Palit and Sister Nivedita of the Ramakrishna Mission, that beneficent lady who had consecrated her life to, and died in, the service of India."*

As a despairing protest against the Government measure and as the embodiment of a national sentiment the other move inaugurated during this time was the Swadeshi Movement. It meant the boycott of foreign goods and support of indigenous products. The spontaneous support it received

* *Op cit*, p 213

was a measure of the popular feelings and though the Government was sure that for economic reasons it would collapse, for the moment it brought the markets to a standstill and the European mercantile community had to suffer from its enduring consequences.

Nivedita whole-heartedly supported the Swadeshi Movement both in principle and in practice. Abandoning the use of foreign goods, she took to all available Swadeshi commodities She spoke and wrote enthusiastically about it describing the vow of Swadeshi as a Tapasya and Dharma.

> The note of manliness and self-help is sounded throughout the Swadeshi Movement. There is here no begging for help, no cringing for concessions....There will yet come a time when in India a man who buys from a foreigner what his own countrymen would by any means supply will be regarded as on a level with the killer of cows today. For assuredly, the two offences are morally identical ..It is precisely in a matter like the keeping of the Swadeshi vow that the Indian people especially can find an opportunity to show their true mettle.

Bravely and cheerfully waiving aside the apprehension of its speedy failure, she wrote:

> The clear sight that shows us where to strike, and the strong love of our own people, the helpless, the little children of the Motherland, that is to make every blow tell, these, and these only, are the conditions that we want. Having these, we cannot fail. And we shall not fail. For all the forces of the future are with us. The Swadeshi Movement has come to stay, and grow, and to drive back forever in modern India the tides of reaction and despair.

The popular feelings reached their height as the Government issued numerous circulars of a restrictive character. One such was about the singing of the song *Bande Mataram* and shouting of the same slogan in public streets.

In spite of strong protests, the proposal of Partition was

carried into effect on October 16. The Congress asked the people to observe it as a day of national mourning and fasting. It also decided to raise a National Fund for helping home industries. On the same day, in a most spectacular meeting, the foundation stone of the Federation Hall was laid by Mr. Ananda Mohan Bose. The veteran leader had written his speech on his sick bed but was too weak to read it out in the meeting and Mr. Surendranath Banerjee read it out on his behalf. Nivedita noted the day as the 'National Day' in her diary and since then always remembered October 16 as a special day.

The Congress held its sessions in December 1905 at Banaras. Mr. G. K. Gokhale was the President-elect. The Partition of Bengal, and the Boycott and Swadeshi Movements were the chief items on the agenda. Mr. Tilak with the Maharashtrian group and Lala Lajpat Rai of Punjab had attended. From Bengal the Congress members who were now divided into the Moderates and Extremists also attended. The important point at issue in the Congress was the acceptance of the Boycott and Swadeshi Movements of Bengal within its programme The Extremists of Bengal led by Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal, were determined to get the Boycott resolution accepted. There was a tussle. Mr. Gokhale who was a liberal was very cautious. He did not want to take any step that would anger the British Government. He declared: "For better or for worse our destinies are now linked with those of England, and what the Congress fully recognizes is that whatever advance we seek must be within the Empire itself."

The Extremists of course forced their opinion and carried their point. In the end their resolution was unanimously accepted. After this achievement Nivedita gladly wrote: "The one thing that strikes a first-time visitor to the Congress, for instance,—a visitor who goes with a determination to ignore preconceptions and judge as far as possible from facts, —is the extraordinary agreement of all members, from extreme right to extreme left"

Nivedita had been invited by Mr. Gokhale to attend the Congress. She reached Banaras on December 25, 1905, and put up at a house in Tilbhandeswar. Though she did not participate in the proceedings, she attended all the sittings and

followed the proceedings with profound interest. Her house in Tilbhandeswar was a meeting place of all leaders. She was naturally not in agreement with the views of the Moderates and was glad that the Extremists carried their point. But Mr. Gokhale was her friend and she worried about him a lot.

An interesting instance shows how cautiously Mr. Gokhale tried to proceed to check the enthusiasm of the Extremists. At one time during the sessions the members observed the presence of Sarala Devi Chowdhrani. Some of them asked Mr. Gokhale to request her to sing the *Bande Mataram* song. The singing of that song in public meeting was prohibited in Bengal. Though they were in Banaras Mr. Gokhale thought it would unnecessarily arouse the Government's ire. But on the insistence of the members Mr. Gokhale had to request Sarala Devi to sing *only* a few lines of the song. She, of course, sang the whole song, and it was highly appreciated.

After the Congress deliberations were over, the usual vote of thanks was given to Mr. Gokhale as the President. After some Indian speakers had addressed the gathering, Nivedita rose to thank him. She thanked him not as others had done for his great political services to India, but for his still greater spiritual services to England in trying to make England just and thus saving her from herself. The implication was well understood and appreciated by the radicals

In the Calcutta session of the Congress held in 1906, the Extremists led by Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal with Sri Aurobindo at his side, and Mr. Tilak leading the Maharashtrian group, joined hands and organized themselves as a new political party to join the battle with the Moderate Party. In course of subsequent events the Congress was finally captured by the Nationalists after the Surat Congress in 1907.

Nivedita did not attend any Congress meeting after the Calcutta Session. She was pained to notice the widening of the split between the different parties in the Congress She pleaded with the leaders not to break up the united front of the Congress. In an article captioned 'The Indian National Congress' she emphatically wrote:

> Young India is fascinated by the political spectacle in European countries: fascinated, and also perhaps

> hypnotised by it. She imagines, perhaps, that until she can reproduce the bear-garden of opposite parties, she has failed to emulate the vigour and energy of Western patriotism This at least is the only excuse for that evil fashion which has made its appearance amongst us, of mutual recrimination and mutual attack. Those who are fighting on different parts of the self-same field are wasting time and ammunition by turning their weapons on each other, instead of on a common foe. The fact is, young India has yet to realize that hers is not a movement of partisan politics at all, but a national, that is to say, a unanimous progression.

Rightly did Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee write: "She was a pronounced nationalist—though her political opinions were quite radical and definite. She could never forgive partisanship or faction fights in Indian politics or journalism, she believed in the great need and efficacy of our presenting a united front... The promotion of the cause of nationality was with her a mission and a passion, as was women's education."

It may not be out of place to mention here that during this time the idea of a national banner expressing the unity of India suggested itself to Nivedita. "A banner is at once a benison and a menace, a consecration and a rallying-cry. It is as an altar, at whose foot, whether for assault or defence, men's lives are freely offered up. Generations come and go. New combinations arrive and vanish, but that for which the national symbol stands—that ineffable union of *jana-desha-dharma* for which every people fights—remains for ever, simple and steadfast as Eternity, mirrored in the fugitive minds of its myriad worshippers."

Nivedita desired to make the Vajra or Thunderbolt a symbol because according to ancient traditions it signified honour, purity, wisdom, sanctity and energy. Glorifying the great sage Dadhichi for his self-sacrifice, she wrote:

> But the *secret* of this is a different matter. The gods, it is said, were looking for a divine weapon, that is to say, for *the* divine weapon, *par excellence*– and they were told that only if they could find a man willing to give his own bones for



National Flag as designed by Sister Nivedita in 1905



National Flag as embroidered by students of Sister Nivedita and exhibited in the Congress Exhibition at Calcutta in 1906

> the substance of it, could the Invincible Sword be forged. Whereupon they trooped up to the *rishi* Dadhichi and asked for his bones for the purpose. The request sounded like mockery. A man would give all *but* his own life-breath, assuredly, for a great end, but who, even to furnish forth a weapon for Indra, would hand over his body itself? To the *rishi* Dadhichi, however, this was no insuperable height of sacrifice. Smilingly he listened, smilingly he answered, and in that very moment laid himself down to die—yielding at a word the very utmost demanded of humanity.
>
> Here, then, we have the significance of the Vajra. The Selfless Man is the Thunderbolt. Let us strive only for selflessness, and we become the weapon in the hands of the gods. Not for us to ask how. Not for us to plan methods. For us, it is only to lay ourselves down at the altar-foot. The gods do the rest. The divine carries us. It is not the thunderbolt that is invincible, but the hand that hurls it. Mother! Mother! take away from us this self! Let not fame or gain or pleasure have dominion over us! Be Thou the sunlight, we the dew dissolving in its heat.

As early as 1905, Nivedita started working out her idea. In a letter dated February 5, she wrote to Miss MacLeod:

> We have chosen a design for a National Flag—the Thunderbolt—and have already made one. Unfortunately, I took the Chinese war-flag as my ideal, and made it black on red. This does not appeal to India, so the next is to be yellow on scarlet.

Nivedita got another flag embroidered by her pupils in scarlet and yellow and had it displayed in the Exhibition organized by the Congress in 1906. Many eminent persons, Dr. J. C. Bose among them, accepted this symbol and started using it.

When, in 1909, the question of a national flag was openly discussed in the press, an article on the Vajra as the National Flag, together with its pictures, was published in the *Modern Review*.

The political agitation gradually assumed a revolutionary

character after the breaking up of the Barisal Conference by the Government in April 1906. The Extremists, who called themselves the Nationalists, gradually got the upper hand. "What has the Congress ever gained," they asked, "by all its eloquent pleading for rights, all its moderation, all its professions of loyalty, its sincere efforts for constitutional reforms?" Sri Aurobindo Ghosh who had joined hands with Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal in editing the *Bande Mataram* became the virtual leader of the Nationalists but till then he was acting behind the scenes without being known to the public. Shortly after, the Government prosecuted him as the editor of the *Bande Mataram* and he came in public view.

The repressive measures adopted by the Government to curb the serious unrest that prevailed in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal in the wake of the breaking up of the Barisal Conference gave rise to a third element in Bengal, and that was terrorism. The avowed object of the secret societies of the terrorists was to collect arms and manufacture bombs to do away with certain types of officials. It was a very different thing from the secret revolutionary organization and the open armed revolt of which Sri Aurobindo spoke so often.

Nivedita was a profound nationalist, though radical in her views As against the policy of the Moderates she supported the programmes of the Nationalists. But she never actively participated in their activities. It is surprising therefore that some biographers implicate her in the activities of the terrorists, mentioning her even as a leader of the terrorists.

In her biography, Mme. Lizelle Reymond has given a picture of Nivedita drawn from her own imagination thus:

"She did not remain unimplicated in the Muraripukur Road Laboratory... Nivedita did not hesitate to help these amateur chemists as best as she could. Daringly she smuggled them into the laboratories of the Presidency College as assistants of Jagdis Bose and P. C. Ray who was a professor of Chemistry. Both needed laboratory aides Both were of course unaware of Nivedita's audacity in the matter of providing them."

In his book, already referred to above, Mr. Girijashankar Roy Chowdhury, adds colour to this imaginative picture by saying: "Nivedita's views were not only revolutionary. In fact, before

coming in contact with Swami Vivekananda she was a dangerous anarchist. We have heard that she was a nihilist of the worst type. What she was she again became after the Swami's death. It was nothing new for her to become a revolutionary."*

These statements are disproved by the actual facts of life. It has been mentioned before that after becoming a teacher the only unrest Nivedita experienced was of a religious kind and she found peace in life after meeting Swami Vivekananda. In a letter dated December 6, 1905, we find her writing, "When I was quite young—growing out of childhood, I thought, and I think I still think, that the only *passion* I would ever know would be the passion for Truth. And the conflict between that and medievalism made the anguish of life. But Swamiji took all the pain out of it—and lo! it is a new world." And again, at one place in her diary she wrote: "In my childhood, as it seems to me, I was pushing on eagerly, along a narrow path to *truth*. At 17 to 21 the idea of a certain truth, specifically and historically reliable, died in me. Still I sought truth with the same feverish and fanatical longing as before At 28 I met Swamiji—was gradually introduced into a large generalization." This is noted on Monday, July 22, 1907. Can a seeker after truth be a nihilist of the worst type at the same time?

Again the statement 'After Swamiji's death she became what she was before' means that she was not in the least influenced by the Swami. Does this need any comment? Is not her life an answer to such ridiculous statements?

And again, if she was a terrorist, why was she not arrested? The explanation given is that because she was a foreigner and had many friends among high officials she was not arrested. But if Nivedita had really indulged in terrorism, she would have been promptly arrested. Did not the British Government intern Mrs. Annie Besant in 1916 during the Home Rule Movement? A close watch was kept on Nivedita's movements and her post was regularly censored. If something incriminating had been found in her work, she would have been promptly imprisoned or deported.

Another fact which proves her non-participation in terror-

* *Op cit*, p 326

ism is her relation with Dr. J. C. Bose. Since her return to India in 1902 till 1911 she was constantly helping Dr. Bose in writing his research books. Nivedita had practically prepared the complete manuscript of his book *Plant Response*. From her letters and diaries it is gathered that her association with the Boses continued up to the last day of her life. Dr. Bose either came to 17 Bosepara Lane or Nivedita went to 93 Circular Road while they worked together on his books. They spent the summer and Puja holidays every year together in Mayavati or Darjeeling. In 1907 they went abroad and returned in 1909 together. Dr. Bose's scientific work depended on Government aid. If he had close connection with one who had affiliations with terrorism, the Government would have taken a sterner attitude, and Dr. Bose's work would have suffered a lot. Dr. Bose was anxious about Nivedita's political views and often requested her to be cautious. It was only after she met Lady Minto in 1910 and at her request, met the Chief Commissioner of Police that Dr. Bose felt relieved and safe.

Mr. Bhupendranath Dutt, a younger brother of Swami Vivekananda and a revolutionary, mentions in his book *Swami Vivekananda—Patriot Prophet* that Nivedita had asked them not to inform her about their secret revolutionary activities.

On one occasion, two young boys of the revolutionary group got into their head to commit dacoity in a house at Tarakeswar. They went to Nivedita to ask for her revolver. Nivedita was very angry with them and refused to give it to them. On the other hand, she went to their leader, Jatindranath, and told him everything, asking him to prevent such young men from indulging in lawlessness and outrages.

Workers of the revolutionary parties like Mr. Bhupendranath Dutt and Mr. Makhanlal Sen still say that Nivedita never indulged in secret revolutionary activities. Sir Jadunath Sarkar too, who knew Nivedita well, said that he regarded such statements as groundless.

It is not our point here to discuss whether revolutionary activities or terrorism is good or bad. Men who indulged in such activities on the spur of the moment later said it was wrong on their part to have trodden the dangerous paths of lawlessness and violence, unrestrained by the voice of the

elders. Though very few joined hands with the terrorists, many had sympathy for the brave young hearts who sacrificed their lives. A barrister of eminence like Mr. C. R. Das who was against any kind of secret revolutionary action, offered to defend these martyrs in law-courts to save them from the Government's ire.

Thus there is ample evidence to prove that Nivedita was neither a terrorist nor a nihilist. Her idealism, based on that of Swami Vivekananda and her study of Indian conditions was a much more comprehensive, saner and deeper thing than can be understood by an utterance here or an action there torn from its context.

38. *Nation and Nationality*

Swami Vivekananda has been called by some a revolutionary. According to them he was the philosopher of political revolution and it was he who gave Nivedita the necessary training to conduct revolutionary activities. Such statements show an utter lack of understanding of the Swami's life and work

It is true that Swami Vivekananda's lectures awakened the sleeping giant of nationalism. His ideas opened out, without doubt, new lines of thought and action for those who wanted to serve their country. But the change that was effected by his philosophy was much deeper and more pervading than anything political. He was a creator of modern India indeed, as has been said, but in a far wider sense than is understood in politics.

In those days, together with the *Gita* and the *Chandi*, the Swami's works were found with the revolutionaries. It was natural, therefore, for the Government to consider him to be a revolutionary and his organization to be secretly involved in such activities. Though the authorities of the Ramakrishna Mission more than once clarified the aims and objects of their organization, the Government's suspicions were not removed. They were on the contrary strengthened when some revolutionaries later joined the Order. Those who call the Swami a revolutionary forget the fact that if the Swami wanted to form a revolutionary party, he could have easily done so with his power and influence. But he did not do it. Instead, he spent all his energies in forming a spiritual Order. Debabrata, Sachin and others who afterwards gave up their revolutionary activities and joined the Order only show their appreciation of the Swami's idealism which made them give up their earlier modes of thought and action.

The Swami loved India. He thought of India as one

indivisible dynamic unit. 'Man-making' was his task; but his heart responded to all that concerned India. As Nivedita said: "Throughout those years in which I saw him almost daily, the thought of India was to him like the air he breathed." His lectures therefore conveyed his feelings and concern about India.

"What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and the secrets of the Universe, and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face."

In the same strain he said in his Madras address:

"You have been told and taught that you can do nothing, and non-entities you are becoming everyday. What we want is strength, so believe in yourselves. We have become weak, and that is why occultism and mysticism came to us, these creepy things....Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want."

And again in his Calcutta address he said:

"We have to conquer the world. That we have to! India must conquer the world, and nothing less than that is my ideal....The sign of life is expansion; we must go out, expand, show life, or degrade, fester and die. There is no other alternative. Take either of these, either live or die."

This is the philosophical revolution he called for. His inspiring words became a constant ingredient in the mental and moral make-up of the young and the old in those days. But what would be more foolish than to say that he preached terrorism? It only shows a thorough lack of power to grasp the higher values of life.

This idealism of the Swami was before Nivedita's mind when she left the Order in 1902 to do something for the country. In a letter written to Miss MacLeod in 1903 who invited her to go to the West, she said: "My presence in India stands for a certain idea. To leave is to endanger that

idea.. .Our work is to create an idea—the idea that was Swamiji's."

She only changed from the Swami's 'man-making' task to 'nation-making.' The Swami's idealism, she said, was vast and unfathomable, something more concrete was necessary. "Swami is the only person I know of who goes to the root of the matter—national man-making, and I don't know if the Swami formulates all this other." Though the Swami never used the words nation or nation-making or nationality, these words became the key-notes of all her thinking, writing and speaking. She wrote on April 14, 1903:

> The whole task now is to give the word 'nationality' to India, in all its breadth and meaning. The rest will do itself. India must be obsessed by this great conception . It means new views of history, of customs, and it means the assimilation of the whole Ramakrishna-Vivekananda idea in religion, the synthesis of all religious ideas. It means a final understanding of the fact that the political process and the economic disaster are only side issues—that the one essential fact is realization of its own nationality by the Nation.

It was not a superficial interest in the country that led Nivedita to make such a declaration of faith. Since the beginning of the year 1900, she had studied the conditions in India. In her books *The Web of Indian Life* and *The Master as I Saw Him* she has made observations which are both true and significant.

> The process by which the peoples of a vast continent may become mere hewers of wood and drawers of water has already begun, is already well afoot. Their indigenous institutions are all in decay. Their prosperity is gone. Some portion or other of the immense agricultural area is perpetually under famine. Their arts and industries are dead or dying. They have lapsed into mere customers for other men's cheap wares. Even their thought would seem to be imitative. The orthodox is apt to tread the round of his own past eternally. The unorthodox is as

> apt to harness himself to the foreign present, with an equal blindness. In suicidal desperation, the would-be patriotic reiterate the war-cries of antagonistic sects, or moan for the advent of a new religion, as if, by introducing a fifth element of discord, the Indian peoples could reach unity. Nor does the education at present offered promise any solution of the problem. It is the minimum that is possible to the efficient clerk, and even that minimum is undergoing reduction rather than increase.

But Nivedita was optimistic like her Guru who had more than once expressed his conviction that "India was not old and effete, as her critics had supposed, but young, ripe with potentiality, and standing at the beginning of the twentieth century on the threshold of even greater developments than she had known in the past."

Discussing the efforts made by men professing different ideologies to save the motherland from this foreign influence, Nivedita has further stated:

> There were social reformers, who thought that by a programme more purely destructive than they realized, their Motherland would be best served. And while we may deprecate the form taken by their zeal, we can but admit that no other testimony could have been given to the living energy of the race which would have been so convincing. If Indian civilization had really been stationary, as is so sapiently supposed by the West, the embers could hardly have leaped into such flame, at the bare touch of new ideas .. Next came political agitators, who seemed to think that by entire deference to an alien idea their country would be saved.... Outside social and political movements, again, there are a hundred emancipations and revivals of religious centres, all of which are noteworthy symptoms of inherent vitality. And still a fourth school declares that the one question of India lies in the economic crisis, and that that once surmounted all will be well.

Nivedita could not accept any of the interpretations—

social reform, political agitation, religious movements or economic grievances. She knew these to be each a part behind which lay a greater reality dominating and co-ordinating the whole idea of the Indian nationhood. Explaining it she said:

> It begins to be thought that there is a religious idea that may be called Indian, but it is of no single sect, that there is a social idea, which is the property of no caste or group; that there is a historic evolution, in which all are united, that it is the thing within *all* these which alone is to be called 'India'.

This synthetic approach and the faith that India contained sufficient forces of recovery within herself led Nivedita to take interest in the national awakening in all its aspects. She worked, but made no show of her work. How much of truth is embedded in the assertion that she was a great intellectual and moral force that had come down to us in a time of great national need is for posterity to judge. But the tributes paid by some of her eminent contemporaries may be considered in this context before any judgement is passed on her work. The economist Benoy Sarkar said that she was "the philosopher of romantic nationalism and aggressive Indianism." Dr. Rashbehari Ghosh who presided over the memorial meeting held at the Town Hall after Nivedita's death said:

"If the dry bones are beginning to stir, it is because Sister Nivedita breathed the breath of life into them. If our young men are now inspired with a burning passion for a new, a higher, a truer and a nobler life the credit is in no small measure due to the lady who has been so prematurely called away from us. An India united in civic purposes, proud of its past achievements, proud of its contribution to the civilization of mankind, and destined to render still higher service to humanity was the ideal for which she worked. And who can say she worked in vain? Who can say she has not made the steps easier for those who will follow her?

"On one thing I can speak with confidence and that is this If we are conscious of a budding national life at the present day it is in no small measure due to the teaching of Sister Nivedita."

And not without reason did Rabindranath Tagore call her a Mother of the People. In paying a glowing tribute to her he said: "He who has seen her has seen the essential form of man, the form of the spirit. It is a piece of great good fortune to be able to see how the inner being of man reveals itself with unobstructed and undiminished energy and effulgence, nullifying the obstruction of all outer material coatings or impediments. We have been blessed in that we have witnessed that unconquered nobility of man in Sister Nivedita.... The life which Sister Nivedita gave for us was a very great life. There was no defrauding of us on her part —that is, she gave herself up fully for the service of India; she did not keep anything back for her own use. Every moment of every day she gave whatever was best in her, whatever was noblest. For this she underwent all the privation and austerity that we associate with man. Her resolve was this and this alone —that she would give only that which was absolutely genuine; she would not mix self with it in the least;—no, not her hunger or thirst, profit or loss, name or fame; neither fear nor shrinking, nor ease nor rest.... She was in fact a Mother of the People. We had not seen before an embodiment of the spirit of motherhood which, passing beyond the limits of the family, can spread itself over the whole country. We have had some idea of the sense of duty of man in this respect, but had not witnessed wholehearted mother-love of women. When she uttered the words 'Our People', the tone of absolute kinship which struck the ear was not heard from any other among us. Whoever has seen what reality there was in her love of the people, has surely understood that we—while giving perhaps our time, our money, even our life—have not been able to give them our heart; we have not acquired the power to know the people as absolutely real and near ... The man who does not see the people, the nation, in every man, may say with his lips what he likes, but he does not see the country properly. I have seen that Sister Nivedita *saw* the common people, *touched* them, did not simply think of them mentally. The respect with which she would greet some ordinary Mussulman woman dwelling in a hut in a village is not possible for an ordinary individual; for the vision that enables one to see the greatness of humanity in

humble individuals is a very uncommon gift. It was because this vision was so natural to her that she did not lose her respect for India in spite of the nearness of her life to the life of the people of India for so long a time."

Another illustrious son of India, Mr. G. K. Gokhale, said in his speech in the memorial meeting: "Sister Nivedita's personality was a wonderfully striking personality—so striking indeed, that to meet her was like coming in contact with some great force of nature. Her marvellous intellect, her lyric powers of expression, her great industry, the intensity with which she held her beliefs and convictions and last but not least, that truly great gift—capacity to see the soul of things straightway—all these would have made her a most remarkable woman of any time and in any country. And when to these were joined—as were joined in her case—a love for India, that overflowed all bounds, a passionate devotion to her interest and an utter self-surrender in her service and finally a severe austerity of life accepted not only uncomplainingly but gladly for her sake, is it any wonder that Sister Nivedita touched our imagination and captured our hearts or that she exercised a profound and far-reaching influence on the thoughts and ideas of those around her and that we acclaimed her as one of the greatest men and women that have lived and laboured for any land? Sister Nivedita came to us not to 'do good' to us, as some people somewhat patronizingly put it; she came to us not even as a worker for humanity moved to pity by our difficulties, our shortcomings and our sufferings. She came to us because she felt the call of India. She came to us because she felt the fascination of India. She came to give to India the worship of her heart on one side and to take her place among India's sons and daughters in the great work that lies before us all. And the beautiful completeness of her acceptance of India was indeed what no words can express—not merely her acceptance of the great things for which India has stood in the past or of those for which God willing she shall stand again in the future—but of India as she is today with all her faults and shortcomings undeterred by the hardships or difficulties of our lives, unrepelled by our ignorance, superstition and even our squalor."

39. Gopaler-Ma

After the Congress Session, Nivedita stayed on in Banaras for some time During her stay in Banaras, she wrote the Report and the Appeal for the small Home of Service started there by a band of the Swami's disciples in 1900, and went round to collect funds for it.

Nivedita had a consuming desire to visit Rajputana. So she embarked on a tour of the area starting with Sanchi and visiting Ujjain, Chitor, Ajmer, Amber and other places. It was almost midnight when she eached Chitor with her party. It was a moonlit night and they could see the fortress of Chitor a mile off. Silently they sat down on a stone. Nivedita drank in the scene and her mind went back to the olden days of Rajput glory. Padmini was her great favourite and she sat there for long lost in thoughts of her.

After the tour she came back to Banaras where she met Mrs. Annie Besant. During her stay she delivered three public lectures. On January 21, a special worship was held in the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama on the occasion of the birthday of the Swami. The same evening a public meeting was held in the Town Hall where Nivedita spoke on 'The Hindu Dharma and Swami Vivekananda'.

On January 22, 1906, she returned to Calcutta. This year brought two sad news for Nivedita, the deaths of Swami Swarupananda and Gopaler-Ma.

Swami Swarupananda had been to Naini Tal for some work but was laid down with pneumonia and within a few days, on June 27, breathed his last. Since the time Swami Swarupananda had taken charge of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, Nivedita had been in close touch with him. She could not forget those early days in Almora when Swami Swarupananda helped her to understand the intricacies of the Hindu religion. He was one of the most respected monks of the Order and by his passing away, she lost a true friend.

Gopaler-Ma of whom mention has already been made, occupied an important place in Nivedita's life. After meeting her once at a festival at Bally and having heard from the Swami about her so much, Nivedita, Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod had, one moonlit night in 1898, gone to Kamarhatty by boat to meet her. Mounting the flight of steps of the bathing ghat rising out of water, going past the terraced lawn, when Nivedita and party entered the little room of Gopaler-Ma, they were delighted. This was the room where the old saint had stayed for many years and *seen* God! The room was absolutely without comforts. The floor was of stone and so was her bed. She offered them a piece of matting to sit upon and served them with a handful of parched rice and sugar candy. The silent inflooding of rapture that they experienced during this visit filled their lives with intense peace. When the Swami heard of their visit, he remarked: "Ah! this is the *old* India that you have seen, the India of prayers and tears, of vigils and fasts, that is passing away, never to return!"

On many more occasions Nivedita visited Gopaler-Ma at Kamarhatty. At the ripe old age of ninety when she fell ill Swami Saradananda brought her to Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. As soon as Nivedita came to know of it she offered her own house and promised to look after her. Nivedita's love and devotion, purity and sincerity had brought about a change in Gopaler-Ma's heart. The old orthodox lady who had felt the natural shock of having a European in the house in 1897, willingly agreed to spend the remaining days of her life in that very person's house in 1903.

In the middle of December, 1903, she came to stay with Nivedita. Nivedita was very happy Her 'dear little grandmother' and 'dearest treasure' was with her now. She felt that her house already sanctified by the Holy Mother's visits was all the more sanctified by Gopaler-Ma's presence. "I feel thrilled," she wrote, "for I believe that Gopaler-Ma's sainthood is as great as that of Paramahamsa. For in her was such motherhood that the heart of Ramakrishna became a child to her. Could more be said?"

For two and a half long years Gopaler-Ma stayed at 17 Bosepara Lane. A young brahmin widow, Kusum, stayed there



Gopaler Ma and Sister Nivedita

to look after her. But even in the midst of her multifarious activities Nivedita spared time to sit by her bedside and massage her feet. Nivedita then became another person—forgotten was all her work and learning—she felt blessed to be able to be of service to this saintly lady.

On July 6, 1906, it seemed that the last hour had come. In the evening, at the rising of the full moon, Gopaler-Ma was slowly taken to a room on the Ganges side. In the silence of the night they sat by her side watching her slow hard breathing. She lay at the Ganges side a full day and night, silently and peacefully. Long after midnight, on the second night, the tide set in—the end was coming—slowly the bearers lifted the body in the cot, and then on the shoulders of the devotees it was borne swiftly out of the room—down the steps of the embankment to the holy waters. The sacred words—*Om Ganga Narayana! Om Ganga Narayana Brahma!* were whispered in her ears. A moment more and with the last breath gone—all shouted *Haribol.* The spirit had taken flight; only the garment of flesh remained behind.

With a heavy heart Nivedita returned to her house. That was on July 8. Two days later Nivedita arranged a small function in Gopaler-Ma's memory in her house. A big decorated picture of Sri Ramakrishna was placed in her room and near it a small photo of Gopaler-Ma. After Kirtan, Prasad was distributed and then the assembled ladies dispersed.

Nivedita treasured with her the rosary of beads on which Gopaler-Ma had become a saint. For how many long years, hour after hour, day after day, year after year, had Gopaler-Ma told her beads!

At this time news reached Calcutta that East Bengal was in the grip of famine and floods. The rains had failed and that brought in famine conditions. It was borne in grim silence by the proud and independence-loving fisherfolk and farmers of the land. But by August, on the breaking of the monsoon, excessive rain had fallen. The swollen rivers suddenly broke their bounds and floods came in, doubling the disaster created by famine. A group of monks and novices from the Ramakrishna Mission went there for relief work.

As more news came in, Nivedita could not sit quietly in

Calcutta. As, without a second thought, she had plunged into plague work, similarly she got ready to leave for East Bengal.

On September 8, Nivedita arrived in East Bengal where villages after villages were under water. Wading through knee-deep water or sailing in palm-boats across the rice-fields, she found her way from one farm-house to another, bringing hope and succour to the distressed.

Today conditions have changed in the country. When famine and flood hit a part of the country Government help is rushed to it and societies of social workers hasten to give help. But in 1906 things were different. Nivedita had no woman worker with her, there was no government aid. The scenes of distress and the courage of the sufferers melted the soft heart of Nivedita. In her article entitled 'The Land of the Water-ways' she gave a thorough picture of the land, its difficult conditions and suggested ways to save situations created by floods.

The great love of Nivedita sustained the depressed hearts of many women. She had come to them as a real sister. When she left a particular village, the womenfolk came to see her off up to the edge of the water-meadows. And as her boat left the shore, she turned round and saw them standing, their hands raised in the attitude of prayer. She could not but admire the greatness of these poor women who even in their want and anxiety did not fail to pour their benedictions on her who was well-clothed and well-fed. With her heart filled with thankfulness for being able to help them in need she returned to Calcutta.

But the strain of the work soon told upon her health. Malaria kept her bed-ridden for many days. The attack of meningitis in the previous year and the recurring attacks of malaria this year completely shattered her health. Christine constantly looked after her, so also the Boses. Swami Brahmananda and Swami Saradananda came down from the Belur Math frequently to look her up and make necessary arrangements for her treatment. When she was a little better both the Sisters went to stay at 'Fairy Hall', Mr. Ananda Mohan Bose's house in Dum Dum.

The school had to be closed down for some days because





Mayavati, Advaita Ashrama

Sister Nivedita   Mrs. Sevier   Sister Christine   Abala Bose

of the absence of the Sisters. When Nivedita gained strength, she concentrated on writing again After Swami Swarupananda's death she wrote the editorials under the caption 'Occasional Notes' in the *Prabuddha Bharat.* During this period she undertook to write *The Master As I Saw Him* and *Cradle Tales of Hinduism.* She also helped Dr. Bose in writing his book *Comparative Electro-physiology.* As the peaceful environment at Dum Dum helped in her writing work, she continued her stay there even after she became well.

In the beginning of 1907, Mrs. Sevier came to Calcutta and stayed with them at Dum Dum. The English translation of Swami Swarupananda's *Gita* was then in the press. Both Mrs. Sevier and Nivedita went through its proofs.

At Mrs. Sevier's request Nivedita and Christine went with the Boses to Mayavati during the summer. Swami Virajananda was then in charge of the Mayavati centre. Swami Swarupananda had already made necessary arrangements for the publication of the Swami's complete works and Swami Virajananda was then busy printing them. Nivedita promised to write an Introduction to this publication. So, on return to Calcutta, she wrote the Introduction—'Our Master and His Message'—and duly sent it to Mayavati.

Nivedita's failing health was a great cause of worry to her friends and so Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Bull again and again requested her to go to the West. Nivedita had a premonition that she was not going to live much longer. And if she were to die, how would Christine continue the school work? She was the provider, she knew she must raise more funds for the school These considerations made her think over the matter seriously.

The state of affairs in India then was most depressing. It has already been said that after the breaking up of the Barisal Conference in 1906 political agitation had taken a revolutionary character. After the Calcutta Congress, Nivedita had stopped attending other meetings, but the news of the arrests and deportation of Indian leaders without trial shocked her. She wrote in her diary on the day Lajpat Rai was deported: "Is the Government crazy?"

One day, when she learnt that Mr. Bhupendranath Dutt, a sub-editor of the *Jugantar* had been arrested for writing a

seditious article, she went to the court to get him released on bail. Later, he was given one year's rigorous imprisonment. Nivedita often visited his mother Bhuvaneswari Devi to console her. After his release from jail, Bhupendranath went to America and stayed there for many years.

Nivedita had nothing to do in the changing circumstances. She only worried how things would turn out in the end. But she was still unwilling to leave India.

In the mean time, Dr. Bose's books—*Plant Response* and *Comparative Electro-physiology* had been published and had created quite a sensation in the Western world. Many foreign universities invited him to demonstrate the veracity of his researches. So the Government had to allow him to go to the West for a third time. Dr. and Mrs. Bose prepared to go to Europe and they now insisted on Nivedita going with them. Nivedita ultimately decided to leave for Europe.

It may be mentioned here that Nivedita's departure to England in 1907 has been misrepresented. It has been said that because she openly tried to help Mr. Bhupendranath Dutt, she was disgraced in the eyes of the Government and that it was dangerous for her to stay in India now. The nationalist leaders therefore begged her to choose voluntary exile, so that she could continue to serve the country from abroad. This is not a fact. Bhupendranath has written at one place how *The Englishman* called Sister Nivedita 'a traitor to her race', when the news of her offering bail for him was published. He has not mentioned the possibility of her arrest therein. Again, Mr. Bhupendranath Dutt was arrested on July 24, but long before that, plans had been made for Nivedita's going to the West. In a letter of April 4, to Miss MacLeod, Nivedita mentioned the probability of her going abroad in August. Therefore her departure had nothing to do with Mr. Bhupendranath Dutt's case. It is true that Nivedita severely criticized the British Government in her discussions with her friends and she did attend meetings of the Anusilan Samity and the Dawn Society but she never spoke publicly or wrote anything of a seditious nature. Therefore, there was no possibility of her arrest. Her activities were watched and her post regularly censored. Had anything suspicious been found, she would have been promptly arrested. The probability of her

arrest was there before her leaving India and even after her return. So she had no reason to leave India for that in 1907.

It is also not true to say that she left India to do some political work from abroad. Her work during her stay in the West proves it.

Before leaving India, she prepared notes for the *Modern Review* and the *Prabuddha Bharata* for several months. Finishing her usual round of visits to the Mother's House, the Belur Math and Dakshineswar, Nivedita left Calcutta on August 12, for Bombay where she boarded the steamer on August 15, 1907.

On board, she busied herself with writing *The Master As I Saw Him* and Occasional Notes. When she reached Aden, she received a letter from Christine which greatly relieved her. For Christine had written to say that the school had re-opened, all the children had come back and there were about fifteen ladies in the sewing classes. Sudhira Devi and other teachers were attending to work regularly and the school was a pure delight to her.

40. *Two Years in the West*

ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1907, Nivedita reached England. She met her mother, brother and sister after five years. Mary's joy knew no bounds in welcoming her daughter home from a far-off land which she had made her own

Mary's memory went back some thirty-two years when they were at Manchester A friend of her husband, a missionary in India, had come to visit them. The spiritual earnestness on the face of young Margaret had attracted his attention and he had blessed the child and had said that one day India would call her in her service. And her husband too had told her before his death that one day a great call would come for the child and that she should stand by her then. She had kept her word, and this time on meeting Nivedita, she felt that the prophecy had been fulfilled.

All these years Mary had tried to understand the feelings of her daughter about India. Distance did not matter In spite of differences of soil and climate, of thoughts and ideals, of laws and customs, her daughter had bound together India and England by passion and knowledge and Mary too learnt to cherish India as her own land. Daily did Nivedita speak to them in a language rich in association with the lives and habits and thoughts of the Indian women. Mary felt that India was at her doors. Nivedita had thoughtfully brought presents from India for all her friends and relatives—reed-pens, palm-leaf books, little baskets, Mala-bags, Tulsi-Malas, Rudraksha-beads, incense burners, amulets and spice boxes, pictures of the baby Gopala Krishna and of Brindaban Krishna and innumerable photographs She brought with her two sacred treasures, the holy water of the Ganges and the beads of Gopaler-Ma. She showed them to her mother who reverentially touched them and felt blessed. The great heart of Mary had tried to bring joy to Nivedita's heart by sharing the devotion and sentiments of her daughter. Nivedita understood

that, and often voiced her feelings thus: "That indiscriminating love that my mother gave me. I cannot tell you what a force it is in me yet! That all-giving love."

United happily with her family she stayed at her mother's house. For a week in November, she left for Europe. She met the Boses in Germany and Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Legget in Paris. This was the first time she met Miss MacLeod after the Swami's death and for long hours the two friends talked about the Swami and themselves, recollecting the days spent together in the past.

Returning with the Boses to England, she put up with her mother at Clapham. Her book, *Cradle Tales of Hinduism,* was printed by now, and was well received.

The year 1907 ended. On December 31, she noted in her diary—"A wonderful year! Began at Dum Dum. Ends in London. Two books—*Comparative Electro-physiology* and *Cradle Tales* out—others proceeding—Oh blessed year! Mother!—Mother! Mother!"

During her stay in England, Nivedita tried her best to show to England what India was and could be—by lecturing, writing and talking about her. She gave a series of lectures on the Indian Epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* and the *Vedas* at the Caxton Hall. She also spoke occasionally at the Lyceum Club and the Higher Thought Centre on subjects like 'Life and Work of Swami Vivekananda', 'The Historic Background of Indian Literature', 'The Indian Problem', etc. She wrote articles on subjects like 'The Indian Women', 'Home Life of Indian Women' and 'Indian Ideals'. Besides she continually wrote for the *Modern Review* and the *Prabuddha Bharata.*

In 1908 Prince Kropotkin, the Russian revolutionary leader, came to London and Nivedita met him. She had met him before and his book *Mutual Aid* had impressed her a lot. She discussed with him the Russian Revolution and the prospects of freedom. He spoke with confidence and cheer—"Courage, my friends, courage! In no case can freedom be long delayed The village is the Russian unit and it is also the Indian unit. How much there is in common between villages, in spite of small difference of speech and custom, although one is in Russia, and another in India."

subjects of her talks were: 'The Place of Indian Thought in the Future of the World', 'Education of Oriental Woman', 'Ideals of Womanhood', 'East and West', and 'Vedanta'.

In New York she spent some days with the famous singer Miss Emma Thursby. While on her way to attend a reception she met Mr. F J. Alexander who went with a friend to meet her at the railway station. This is what he wrote about their meeting.

"I had long since read certain of her writings, and therefore it was with something like reverent expectation that I anxiously awaited the hour I was to meet her. But a railway station is not the most advantageous of places for making acquaintances, and worst of all is a railway station in the city of New York Yet for me the meeting was most interesting in spite of this difficulty. A friend of the Sister and myself had been waiting for some considerable time, scrutinizing the different trains that came from Boston.

"We had almost given up hope, when the last train from Boston came plunging in the distance. We said, 'Let us wait for this last train and if she is not aboard this train, let us give it up.' The train was slowing down and in a minute it was beneath the huge shed of the Grand Central Station and in another minute the compartments were getting emptied of their loads of human freight. It was an exciting scene, people pouring in and out of the station gates and the passengers dashing here and there and everywhere. We strained our eyes for several minutes. My heart was throbbing with anticipation and I was getting on edge. 'There she is,' my friend cried out. And my eyes fell upon a woman of about medium height, dressed in a garb resembling that of a nun. She was carrying her own package and walked along with an intensity of manner that would confuse even a New Yorker, accustomed to strenuous life of a big city. 'Come, let us have tea,' were the first words after she had bid us greeting. And so we went into the adjoining restaurant, where amidst the refreshing influence of tea I had my first glimpse of the Sister Nivedita."

They talked for about three quarters of an hour within which time she spoke about India, its politics and philosophy and all. Mr. Alexander was lost in admiration and forgetting his surroundings sat in spellbound attention to her words.

He ended the interview with words which might seem somewhat exaggerated to one who had not met Nivedita. He wrote:

"During my journalistic experience of five or six years, during which time I have interviewed all types of people from United States Senators to interesting hod-carriers and from famous artists to turbulent leaders of labour, I have never met a personality which impressed me in less than an hour's time with being possessed of such a synthetic mind and cyclonic personal energy."

The same evening she was invited to speak in New York by a well-known society. She was asked to speak something about her long experience in India. And for an hour and a half she spoke eloquently about India and her own work. She talked also of Indian metaphysics and culture. Her hearers were astonished to hear her speak about the influence of Indian civilization on Western modes of life and thinking, and her definite view that Central Asia was the scene of international exchange.

She met in America Mr. J. T. Sunderland, the President of the American League which advocated the cause of India's freedom. Here she met the young revolutionaries from Bengal—Taraknath Das and Bhupendranath Dutt. Mr. Girijashankar Roy Chowdhury writes that in America Nivedita collected them and made all arrangements for them.* That too is a wrong statement. Mr. Bhupendranath Dutt says that "they were in all four or five revolutionaries who had fled from India. Nivedita and Dr. Bose made arrangements for his education in New York";† but there is no reference to revolution.

Besides her own writings, Nivedita was engaged in collecting the letters of Swami Vivekananda. The Math had authorized her to do it. So she contacted Miss Mary Hale for the Swami's letters written to her and her family members. Miss Mary Hale was kind enough to forward her letters to Nivedita, who made copies of these letters and sent them to Mayavati. After the publication of the complete works of Swami Vivekananda, the Math authorities were planning to bring out a biography of the Swami. Nivedita promised to help them in that work.

* *Op cit* p 600.
† *Swami Vivekananda—Patriot Prophet,* p 120

Nivedita had planned that as soon as Dr. Bose's lectures in the different universities were over, they would return to India But meanwhile news reached her that her mother was ill with cancer and was suffering unbearable pain. She was at Mrs. Bull's house in Cambridge then, and was very much worried. As she could not leave America immediately she prayed for her mother and wrote consoling letters to her:

> Little Mother, God is all there. It is He who will cut through all bondage and make you easy. Again I long to tell you of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji and of the wonderful life they lived together in the garden, a life that makes one believe and know that *God is really everything*, whether we know it or not. And oh! how they would have helped you! Just a touch—just a look—just a visit and all pain would have been over, and nothing but peace and deep, deep joy would have been yours.

But ultimately she left America in January 1909 for her mother's condition took a turn for the worse. Her mother was then staying at Barley-in-Wharfdale. Swinging between life and death, Mary passed her last days in peace and quiet. She was quite satisfied that her Margot was by her side. On Saturday, January 23, the family received the Holy Communion, their last common participation. On 26th Mary breathed her last.

Nivedita continued to stay with her brother and sister for some more days, for she felt she would not meet them again. She kept her mother's word by rewriting and rearranging her father's sermons and handed them over to May and Richmond. She collected the Swami's letters to Mr. Sturdy and copied them out. In the month of April she went to Great Torrington in Ireland with her brother and sister. There they laid their mother at rest near their father. "Mother rests at last, hand in hand with the lover of her youth, in her home of the past, and the pines sing eternally about them in a circle," she wrote to Mrs. Bull. She was glad that her duty towards her mother was done. Some of the people who had known their father and were present at his funeral thirty-two years ago waited with bowed heads on the steps of the little

chapel to receive her ashes. They had paid their last honour to the dead.

After finishing his lecture tour, Dr. Bose and his wife returned to England in March. At the end of May they went to Europe. So did Mrs. Bull, Miss MacLeod and Nivedita. They stayed together for about a month in Wiesbaden. On June 30, they went to Geneva to see the birthplace of St. Joan of Arc and from there they reached Marseilles to sail for India on July 2, 1909. On the same day, Sir C. Wyllie was assassinated in London by a Punjabi boy.

Some biographers make Nivedita responsible for this incident saying that her preaching revolution in the West resulted in this atrocity. This is sheer imagination. On July 7, Nivedita wrote to Mrs. Bull:

> We were startled by the appalling news of the assassination of Sir C. Wyllie in London. It must have happened the night we were journeying to Marseilles. The papers seem to say that the poor lad had personal relations with this man, so probably the motive for the crime has been personal, but in any case it is frightful news and sends us on our journey with heavy hearts.

They reached Bombay on July 16, and after a period of two years Nivedita reached Bosepara again on July 18, 1909.

Her arrival in India is coloured with mystery by some of her biographers. She is described as having assumed the name Mrs. Margot and having dressed fashionably to avoid recognition. It is also said that she took a different route from what the Boses had taken. At Baghbazar too she kept up her fashionable disguise and did not move out for three weeks. Another biographer has written that, in order to avoid the suspicion of the police, she went from Bombay to Madras and then went to Calcutta.

This is all fabrication. From her diary we come to know that she came to Calcutta directly from Bombay. She was not in hiding for three weeks for she reached Calcutta on July 18, and on the 19th and the 22nd of July she went to see the Boses. On the 20th and the 24th she went to meet the Holy Mother in her house. On the 25th she went to Cossipore,

Belur and Dakshineswar. On the 20th and 21st Swami Saradananda and Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee came to meet her. Besides, from July 25 onwards, Mr. Dinesh Sen went to her house everyday to read with her his book on Bengali literature.

It is said she remained incognito for three weeks because her friends had warned her that the police were threatening to arrest her as soon as she landed. Now, if her presence in India was so dangerous, why had she to be careful for three weeks only? Why did the police not arrest her after that period?

41. *Changed Aspects*

WHEN NIVEDITA RETURNED to India, the political climate of India had altered. The revolutionaries who had indulged in outrageous murders and bomb-throwing were either hanged or sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Mr. Barindra Ghosh and Mr. Ullaskar Dutt were first condemned to death but their sentence was afterwards commuted to transportation for life. Mr. Bhupendranath Dutt had gone away to America after his release from jail. Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal had similarly gone to England. In 1908, Sri Aurobindo was arrested in the Alipore Bomb Case. For a year, while his trial was being conducted, he was in the Alipore Jail, but he was released by the middle of 1909. At the same time Debabrata Basu, Sachin and others were also released. Most of the other nationalists were either in jail or had withdrawn from active politics. Many leaders were deported without trial. Searching of houses and arrests still continued. The repressive measures of the Government had prevented any recrudescence. But the imprint of the nationalistic movement had not been completely effaced. Swadeshism held sway. In art, literature and industry national revival was remarkable and the determination of the people to adopt national forms of life had grown stronger.

Some of the revolutionaries like Debabrata and Sachin joined the Belur Math as monks. This attracted the attention of many—especially the Government. The Holy Mother was then in Calcutta. Those who were released came to her for blessings before joining the Math. It often happened that the senior monks had to stand guarantee for one or the other of the revolutionaries who had joined the Math.

Happily Nivedita reported about this conversion to Miss MacLeod: "All parties are now united to say that the new spirit comes from Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and the men who have been released come to make Pranams to the Holy Mother. She says: "What fearlessness! Only Ramakrishna and

Swamiji could have brought about this fearlessness! All their fault!" And again in another letter:

"Such a change has come over the country. All call themselves disciples of Swamiji. The other day I said to the Holy Mother, 'The time is very near that was promised by Sri Ramakrishna when you should have too many children. The whole of India is yours!' She answered, 'I am seeing it' "

During his term of imprisonment, Sri Aurobindo had taken to the study of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* and had started practising Yoga. His idea was, as he himself said, to gather spiritual strength to carry on his work. But his spiritual practices led him further than he expected and his view of life was radically changed. On being released from jail in May 1909, Sri Aurobindo realized that the spirit of nationalism was dying. In order to fan it to flame again, he arranged weekly meetings, but did not get enthusiastic response. He started two weeklies, *Karma Yogin* in English and *Dharma* in Bengali. The weeklies were not purely political for they included articles on Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Yoga, the Hindu Dharma, etc. During this time, Sri Aurobindo met Nivedita often as he has said: "Later on I began to make time to go and see her occasionally at Baghbazar." *

The Government were now trying to introduce the reforms of Lord Morley. The Moderates and Nationalists tried again to come together, but on this issue they fell out once and for all. Sri Aurobindo's slogan was 'no compromise' and he published an open letter in the *Karma Yogin* in which he clearly stated—'No co-operation without control'. He knew that to accept Government reforms was to fall away from the ideal of Independence.

The Government realized that Sri Aurobindo was the only obstacle left in the way of success of its repressive policy so it decided to deport him. Nivedita got this news and she informed Sri Aurobindo about it She also advised him to go into hiding or to leave British India and work from outside. Sri Aurobindo did not think either necessary. He wrote again an open letter in the *Karma Yogin* in which he spoke of the project of deportation and left the country what he called his

* *Op cit* p. 117

last will and testament. The expected result was that the Government dropped the idea of deportation.

A few days later, however, news reached Sri Aurobindo one night while he was in the *Karma Yogin*'s office that the Government intended to search his office and arrest him He immediately left for Chandernagore in French India. He sent a message to Nivedita to continue editing the *Karma Yogin* in his absence This she did till the paper was suspended later.

In January 1910, Mr. Aswini Kumar Dutt and others were released from jail. Nivedita received the news with joy Her school was decorated with auspicious banana leaves and festoons and it was closed for the day. Among those released was a brave, humble, god-fearing Brahmo preacher. His wife and children were smitten down by poverty during his absence. Nivedita did not know him personally, but when the news reached her, she shared the sufferings of his people The day he was released, she felt joyful as if her own father was returning home.

Sri Aurobindo left for Chandernagore in February 1910. We do not know the exact date of his departure. But Nivedita went to Chandernagore on February 14; therefore his departure must be prior to that date. It was the day of Saraswati Puja. After the Puja was over in the morning, she left for Chandernagore by 1-30 p.m. and returned at 11 at night. On the 28th of the same month she went to Chandernagore a second time.

Many legends have been circulated about this event Mr. Ramchandra Majumdar writes that he conveyed the message of the impending arrest to Sri Aurobindo who listened to him quietly, and then asked him to enquire of Nivedita what should be done. Thereupon Nivedita advised him to go into hiding. Sri Aurobindo agreed and before leaving went to Bosepara Lane to meet Nivedita and then went to the quay.

In the French biography of Nivedita, Mme. Lizelle Reymond writes that the news of Sri Aurobindo's impending arrest was first received by Jogin-Ma, and it was Gonen Maharaj who informed Sri Aurobindo about it. Before leaving, he went to Udbodhan to meet the Holy Mother, and Sister Nivedita and Gonen Maharaj went to see him off at the quay.

Sri Aurobindo has corrected all these statements and in consequence this fantastic story has been omitted from the

English edition of her book entitled *The Dedicated.* To quote his words:

"It was not Gonen Maharaj who informed me of the impending search and arrest, but a young man on the staff of the *Karma Yogin*, Ramchandra Mazumder, whose father had been warned that in a day or two the *Karma Yogin* office would be searched and myself arrested. There have been many legends spread about on this matter and it was even said that . Sister Nivedita sent for me and informed me and we discussed what was to be done and my disappearance was the result.. Sister Nivedita knew nothing of these new happenings till after I reached Chandernagore. I did not go to her house or see her; it is wholly untrue that she and Gonen Maharaj came to see me off at the Ghat.*

Sri Aurobindo also denied that Nivedita advised him to go to Chandernagore and that she made arrangements for his stay at Mr. Motilal Roy's house. 'It was a command from above' which he followed. On a previous occasion, when the Government was planning to deport him it was Nivedita who advised him to go into hiding. It may be that this suggestion worked on his mind.

It is true that Sri Aurobindo did not meet Nivedita before leaving. That is why we find her eagerly going to Chandernagore on February 14, though it was the Saraswati Puja day. She must have gone to Chandernagore on both the occasions only to meet Sri Aurobindo. We have been informed that it was Nivedita who got money from Dr. J. C. Bose to meet Sri Aurobindo's expenses of going to Pondicherry. But Sri Aurobindo has not mentioned anything about it.

Another description of the same event as has been given in the Bengali biography by Mr. Moni Bagchi is still more fantastic and therefore is not discussed here.

From this event only one fact emerges that Sri Aurobindo had so much trust in Nivedita that he left the paper completely in her hands when he left. Nivedita came forward to take the onerous task upon herself as she had done so before more than once. Though never seen in the front line of action, she had always been a silent, selfless worker behind the scenes. She continued the *Karma Yogin* until its suspension in April

* *Op cit* p. 118.

1910, when Sri Aurobindo had already reached Pondicherry. During the three months that it was in her hands, the tone of the paper changed from politics to the Swami's ideologies. The same year the report of the Swami's birthday was also published in it. In one issue she had declared her credo thus:

> I belive that India is one, indissoluble, indivisible.
>
> National unity is built on the common home, the common interest and the common love.
>
> I believe that the strength which spoke in the Vedas and Upanisads, in the making of religions and empires, in the learning of scholars, and the meditation of the saints, is born once more amongst us, and its name today is Nationality.
>
> I believe that the present of India is deep-rooted in her past, and that before her shines a glorious future.
>
> O Nationality, come thou to me as joy or sorrow, as honour or as shame! Make me thine own!

Since Sri Aurobindo's departure to Pondicherry the Government kept a keen watch on Nivedita. Her post was strictly censored. Sometimes she received her letters and packets completely torn. It irritated her often. One day she wrote a letter to the Post-Master General to the following effect:

> Dear Sir,
>
> It is of course easy to understand the overwhelming curiosity of some members of your staff about the confidences of my sister in regard to her babies and her cooking. I should be grateful, however, if you would kindly instruct them to *close up again* the letters they have opened and read. I should like to avoid the irritation as well as the possible loss of letters, which their present methods engender! I have been at great pains to keep the enclosed envelope in the exact condition in which I received it this morning—but I have a long list of grievances in accumulation, halves of first pages carelessly torn, with the wrappers off literary papers, and so on. I shall venture to hope that this letter, of which I keep a copy, may reach you personally.

Conditions, however, became favourable for her when an unexpected thing happened. On March 2, 1910, Lady Minto, the Vicereine, together with an American lady, Mrs. Phillipson paid a visit to Sister Nivedita at 17 Bosepara Lane. She simply said she had heard about an English lady who was running a school in the native quarters. Nivedita could not recognize her till Lady Minto informed her who she was before leaving. The very next day she wrote to Miss MacLeod:

"You will never guess the piece of news we have for you today. Yesterday, Lady Minto came to see us .... At any rate this extraordinary thing has happened. One scarcely believes it oneself."

The next day Lady Minto with one Miss Sorabji visited the Belur Math. She evidently had no idea that Nivedita was connected with it. Another day Lady Minto went with them to see the Dakshineswar Temple garden, the place of Sadhana of Sri Ramakrishna. Lady Minto wrote later:

"I have been much interested lately in penetrating into the poorest part of Calcutta to visit a Miss Noble, who has adopted the Indian mode of life and calls herself Sister Nivedita. She is an idealist and sees wonderful meanings in the Hindu religion, but it is difficult to follow her reasoning. I went incognito with an American, a Mrs. Phillipson and Victor Brooke, to see the School, where Sister Nivedita teaches a class of girls. She spoke gratefully of the Reforms and the sympathetic treatment Indians had received during Minto's regime She says the people amongst whom she lives are high caste but intensely poor and very proud. I think she idealizes their virtues .... She has studied the evolution of religious thought over thousands of years, and maintains that philosophy and knowledge originated in India.

"Sister Nivedita lives in the heart of the Native city, in a tiny house in a back alley, and considering the present unrest, I knew I should never be allowed to visit that quarter of the town without special police protection, had it been known that I was going there. As I was leaving, I told her I was the Viceroy's wife, which surprised her greatly. She has a charming face, with a very intelligent expression, and we made friends. When I told her how much I had disliked the Kali temple, she begged me to come and see the temple on the banks of

the river where her Master, Vivekananda,* had worshipped and meditated for twelve years, till he was satisfied that he had discovered the meaning of 'truth'. A few days later this visit was arranged.

"I started in a hired motor with Victor Brooke, meeting Sister Nivedita *en route*. We drove to the temple, and leaving the motor outside the garden gates, walked first past a *Neam* tree, which is supposed to be sacred, where poor women come to worship, leaving curious little mis-shapen clay horses at the foot of the tree as an offering to the Gods. We walked on till we came to a stone terrace facing the Hoogli It was under a tree on this terrace that Vivekananda sat. The spot was well chosen for meditation and looked peaceful and beautiful in the light of the setting sun. We were joined here by a *Swami*, who escorted us to the cloister that surrounds the courtyard of the Temple. We were not allowed to penetrate further, but looked through the archways at the building in which the image of Kali dwells. Priests were walking backwards and forwards, and tiny naked children were playing about the steps. This wonderful temple seems to breathe peace and contentment; it was scrupulously clean and a marked contrast to the Kalighat. Pilgrims came with bunches of flowers as offerings, to lay at the foot of Vivekananda's holy tree. ..

"We were taken to see his little bedroom which is considered so holy that we were obliged to remove our shoes before entering. It was a curious mixture of squalor and comfort. The bed with mosquito curtains seemed luxurious; the walls were hung with a curious medley of pictures of gods and goddesses, and one of Our Lord saving Peter from drowning. This little room seemed to fill Sister Nivedita's mind with holy thoughts, but to me it was the only jarring note in the otherwise beautiful surroundings.

"We had arranged to return by boat and walked down a flight of steps to the river, where at stated times crowds of poeple came to bathe. We got into a little native sampan, rowed by three men. Picturesque groups of people were sitting on the steps as we passed. I have often watched them from the launch on our way to and from Barrackpore, but I never

* The reference here and elsewhere is to Sri Ramakrishna and not Swami Vivekananda

thought I should take a trip in a sampan myself. Sister Nivedita's friend, Sister Christine, accompanied us. Cushions were provided for me to sit on, and tea was prepared as we rowed down the river. I took the precaution of saying that I preferred it without milk, as visions of typhoid passed through my mind. The tea had a good flavour and, I think must have been the best Orange Pekoe, but they told us everything was *Swadeshi*, biscuits, tea, sugar, cups and saucers. I enjoyed gliding down the river to the landing-stage where the motor met us. No one recognized me during the afternoon, and the boatmen were overwhelmed with surprise on receiving more than a month's pay in baksheesh.

"The afternoon was extremely interesting. Sister Nivedita sees beauty in all her surroundings, and has a wonderful knack of quoting old Persian poems, applicable to the subject of conversation, which she recited in a curiously high-pitched voice of reverent devotion. She showed real pleasure at my genuine enjoyment of the afternoon."*

Before leaving, Lady Minto advised Nivedita to 'go on writing'. She invited her to tea privately at the Government House one day. She spoke to her about the attempt made on Lord Minto's life while he was touring Ahmedabad. She expressed her worries about Nivedita, for, she knew the police had an eye on her. She requested her to see the Commissioner of Police which Nivedita did. Nivedita was glad to be acquainted with the Mintos and had a vague apprehension that things would not look as bright when the Mintos would leave India. It may not be out of place to mention here that Nivedita's sudden death the next year shocked Lady Minto and she wrote a letter of consolation to Christine in which she said:

> It is with very real regret that I read in the newspapers of the sad loss that has been sustained in the death of Sister Nivedita. I cannot resist sending you a few lines of very deep sympathy, and not only for yourself but for all the Indian community for whom she was working. Sister Nivedita had a wonderful personality, and as I look back to the few meetings I had with her with pleasure, and with real admiration for her enthusiasm and single-

* *India, Minto and Morley, 1905-1910,* Mary Countess of Minto, p 384 f

minded desire to assist others. The world is the poorer for her loss, and for you her constant companion and helper the blank she leaves must be irreparable.

It may be mentioned in this context that Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, leader of the Labour Party in the British Parliament, and later the Prime Minister, had come to Calcutta in November 1909. Mr. Nevinson had given a letter of introduction to him for Nivedita with which he went to meet her at Bosepara Lane. He was so impressed by her personality that he took more than one occasion thereafter to meet her and talk with her about Indian ideals and philosophies as she understood them.

42. *Nivedita Girls' School*

"OH IT IS GRAND to be back at one's desk and near the Holy Mother. I cannot say to you how wonderful it is! The place really exists, the whole wonderful dreamland in one's heart is here." So wrote Nivedita to Miss MacLeod in pure delight on reaching India.

Devamata was staying as a guest in the house then. She was an American devotee, small and frail-looking and wore a costume like Nivedita's. She was of a quiet devoted nature and loved to go to the Holy Mother and Swami Brahmnanda at the Belur Math. Before coming to Calcutta she was in Madras.

The school was working in full swing and Christine was in charge of it. Having worked hard for two years during Nivedita's absence, she took leave in August 1909 and went to Darjeeling. Once again Nivedita had to take full charge of the school.

One Pushpa Devi had worked in the school for some time and her leaving the school work after marriage had been a great loss to Christine. But immediately after her, Sudhira Devi had come forward to take up the responsibility. She had joined the school before Nivedita left for the West in 1907; but Nivedita did not know her well then. After her departure, Sudhira Devi had worked with Christine and the two had become great friends. She had joined the school as an honorary worker and gradually came to spend most of the time in the school. Christine often visited Sudhira Devi at her house. Sudhira Devi had studied up to Class VIII in the Brahmo Girls' School. Her love for the country and her desire to give honorary service were inspired by her elder brother, Debabrata Basu who, as has been mentioned before, was a revolutionary. It was perhaps Debabrata's joining the Belur Math that inspired Sudhira Devi to join Nivedita's school.

Sudhira Devi loved to work with the quiet and sweet Christine. She was still not familiar with Nivedita and kept a

Sister Christine and Sister Nivedita

Sister Sudhira



Sister Nivedita Girls' School
(Existing Building)

little aloof from her when she took charge of the school. Nivedita's fiery exterior often kept people at a distance till they became acquainted with her kind and loving heart. So it was with Sudhira Devi, but once she came to know Nivedita, she became a great friend of hers.

The first difficulty that Nivedita experienced was to meet expenses. "Rice and milk have both risen in price and the increasing poverty is something terrible to witness. We have gone into account and will have to cut down many expenses." That was always her way—drastically cutting down her own expenses, to meet the demands of work. At Devamata's suggestion she wrote to Olea, Mrs. Bull's daughter, and a few other ladies in America for raising subscription for the school. But, except from Olea, she received no help.

Besides this school, there were two small branch schools. Their expenses were not more than £3, but due to lack of funds these had to be closed down. The rented building at 16 Bosepara Lane had to be given up too. The school was crowded in her house at No. 17. She never spoke to anyone about the privations she had to suffer. Her European friends sometimes advised her to leave the congested place and rent a house in the more spacious southern part of the city. But Nivedita proudly replied to them: "I will never leave the lane that first gave me shelter." Only Miss MacLeod knew how hard she had to struggle, for, Nivedita wrote to her: "It is a hard battle that has to be fought, but oh! it is so good to be once more in India."

Nivedita was happy to be in India and in her school but she was sometimes disappointed because she could not give her best to the school. She thought she was not the right type of worker that the Swami hoped she would be. In a mood of depression, she wrote:

> I never knew how fretted and feverish and ineffective was my life, until I saw Christine beside me. All the things that Swami dreamt for me, she is fulfilling.

And again:

> You see I am no longer the worker. That place ought to

be Christine's. Even about the school, I cannot hold it much longer; I shall have to turn it over to her.

The fact was that being engaged in various activities Nivedita had not been able to work in the school at a stretch. But her interest in the school work and the children was unabated. Her sympathetic understanding of the children's minds always won them over. There were about sixty to seventy students in the school. Nivedita taught them Geography, History, Needlework and Drawing.

Among the students, there were quite a few grown up girls who taught the junior girls when teachers were not available. Nivedita had picked up sufficient Bengali to teach these girls, but whenever she felt any difficulty Sudhira Devi came over to help. Sometimes she would quietly stand outside the class-room when the senior girls taught. The girls sat on low wooden planks with cushions and in front were low desks. If Nivedita found any girl crouching she would go from behind and ask her to straighten up her back. In the small courtyard she taught the girls drill. A small open plot of land adjacent to the building was purchased where a small garden with lawn and flower-beds was laid out and where the girls played games.

Strict discipline was enforced in class-rooms. Once a small girl, always eager to answer questions, interrupted the class, often by jumping up and blurting out the answers before the girl who was asked could reply. When she did not heed warning, Nivedita punished her by simply ignoring her. This hurt the child and she cried. But Nivedita was adamant. She paid no attention to her till she changed her habit.

One evening, the same girl met Nivedita at a religious festival at another's house. On seeing her the girl ran up to her. Sister lovingly called her to her side and smiled at her. She was very pleased and went and told her mother how lovely their Sister looked that day and how she smiled at her, adding, "Today I was not at all afraid of her. Oh! but how afraid I am of her in the school. She becomes then altogether another person."

Nivedita used to decorate her small room with toys and paintings of the girls and showed them to all who came to meet her. When the art connoisseur Ananda Coomaraswamy one day

visited her room, she showed him round. He praised a small Alpana design drawn by her pupil. Nivedita was so happy that the next day she told the girls: "Coomaraswamy yesterday praised this Alpana design."

Once she thought of introducing Sanskrit in the curriculum. The very thought gave her joy and she said: "How happy will be that day when Sanskrit written on palm-leaves by my girls will decorate my room."

Nivedita's history classes were most interesting. When she talked about any historical personage she became so absorbed in thought that she forgot for the moment that she was in the class-room. Her desire to take the girls on historical visits to places like Puri and Bhuvaneswar, Chitor and Ujjain was never fulfilled. But she made up for it by giving vivid descriptions of the places she herself had visited so that the girls enjoyed them very much. While telling them stories about the Rajput women she used to say: "You must all be brave like them. Oh Daughters of Bharata! You all vow to be like the Kshatriya women." One day while talking about her visit to Chitor she said: "I went up the hill and sat down on my knees. I closed my eyes and thought of Padmini,"—and forthwith she closed her eyes and folded her hands and continued—"I saw Padmini Devi standing near the pyre and tried to think of the last thought that might have crossed Padmini's mind." So saying she sat quiet for a few moments lost in thought. She was very happy to notice that the intelligent young girls, full of imagination and emotions, were quick to grasp the meaning of all that she said.

Though she could not take the girls for long journeys, she often arranged short trips for them—one day by steamer to Dakshineswar, another day by tram to the Zoo, a third day to see the Museum. But her trips were not mere outings. They were educational trips and left indelible impressions upon the fresh young minds. On one occasion, while they were going by boat, it began to roll on its sides due to huge waves. When the girls were afraid, Nivedita said: "Why are you afraid? Don't fear the big waves. Good boatmen remain firm at the helm and go over the waves safely. If in our lives we too learn to remain steadfast, then we will have no fear in life—never."

During their visit to the Zoo, they came up to the enclosure

of the kangaroos. Pointing them out to the girls she said: "See how the young ones are frolicking about. But when they see an enemy they run up to their mothers. We have our Mother too. When we see danger we will also run up to her, then there would be no cause for fear."

Going round the archaeological relics at the Museum they saw an inscribed rock. Nivedita said· "This is the wish-fulfilling rock near which King Ashoka had prayed. Come, let us all sit here and wish." She sat down and closed her eyes, the girls followed suit. Then she asked the girls what they had asked for. When the girls smiled but did not reply, she laughed and said· "Right, wishes should never be spoken aloud."

She always reminded the girls that they were the daughters of Bharata-Varsha. During the Swadeshi Movement she took the girls to the Brahmo Girls' School so that they might listen to lectures given in the adjoining park. In the Swadeshi Exhibition organized by the Congress in 1906, Nivedita sent the handicraft of her students for display. She introduced spinning in her school and appointed an old lady for the task, whom the girls called Charkha-Ma. At a time when the singing of *Bande Mataram* was prohibited by the Government, she introduced it daily in her school prayers. The girls were taken to the Holy Mother and the Belur Math. They were familiar with Swami Vivekananda's life, having heard about him from her often, and Nivedita proudly wrote· "All these girls are gaining certain ideas and impulses. They hold themselves under Swami and the Holy Mother. They are something of disciples as well as pupils."

Nivedita had special consideration for child-widows for whom it was obligatory to observe strict restriction in matters of eating. When she came to know that child-widows had to observe fasts on Ekadashis, her heart went out to them.

One of her students, by name Prafullamukhi, lived very close to the school. She was a child-widow, lively and intelligent, and Nivedita loved her dearly. On Ekadashis Nivedita always sent for her and gave her fruits and sweets to eat. Once it so happened that the whole day Nivedita was very busy and after school went to Dr. J. C. Bose's house. There she suddenly remembered that it was an Ekadashi and she had not given

anything to Prafullamukhi to eat. She could stay there no longer. She immediately rushed home and sent for Prafullamukhi. She lovingly called her to her side and apologetically said again and again: "My child, my child, I quite forgot! How unjust of me: I did not give anything to you to eat but ate myself, how unthoughtful of me!"

When due to family circumstances, some girls could not attend school regularly, Nivedita personally went to their houses, pleaded with their guardians and made arrangements for the continuation of their studies in school. Giribala Ghosh was twenty-two years old when she started attending school. She was a widow with a child and stayed with her uncle in Baghbazar. She was keen on studying in school, but was forced to discontinue her studies because the neighbours criticized her. One day, her grandmother was going to the Ganges for a bath. Passing by the school, she heard prayers being sung by the girls. She liked it so much that she made arrangements for her to rejoin the school. She used to go to the school in the school carriage, but as her lane was narrow it could not go up to her house and she had to walk up to it. On days that she was late, the carriage did not wait for her, and that day she had to absent herself. Nivedita did not like this irregular attendance and therefore gave special permission to the coachman to enter her lane. One day, however, the carriage dashed against the corner of a house and was badly damaged. Next day Nivedita went to meet Giribala's uncle, and persuaded him to send her to school, saying: "You may be displeased with me, but I beg of you to allow this girl to come to school from 11 to 4 p.m The women of your family go to the Ganges for bath or to Kalighat. Why can you not send this girl for a few hours even?" Nivedita's earnest appeal and unselfish love moved Giribala's uncle. He sent for the girl and asked her to go to school with Nivedita who felt happy as if she had received some reward. She told the girl: "My child, henceforward you will be able to attend the school regularly." Saying so, she took Giribala with her to the school. On entering her room, she put a shawl round her shoulders and said "My child, take this, and come to the school everyday covering yourself thus."

Another girl called Mahamaya had tuberculosis. Nivedita and Christine helped her parents by bearing the medical

expenses and had a home rented for her at Puri. When the girl ultimately died they felt very sorry.

Thus the school was for the students a home of bliss. Girls eagerly looked forward to the time when they would go to school and meet their dear Sister who would be at the gates to greet them with folded hands, saying "Ah! my children have come, my children have come."

Her students even now recollect with love and respect the tender affection and care that their dear Sister bestowed on them, and shed tears of joy on remembering her.

43. *Contemporaries*

A LITTLE BLACK PLATE before the front door of 17 Bosepara Lane announced it as 'The House of Sisters', for thus were known Nivedita and Christine in the neighbourhood. It also bore the words: Hours of call—7 to 9 a.m.

But to this place flocked at all hours of the day men, women and children. Sir Jadunath Sarkar wrote: "Many of our educated countrymen—I narrate it with shame—used to call on her at every hour of the day and disturb her meditation and work, thoughtlessly, out of a frivolous spirit of enjoying the fun of talking to a remarkable new-comer, and a 'pacca memsahib' too! Some begged for money at the end, or literary contributions from her pen, or letters of recommendation to some one in power! Very few offered her the assistance of their own labour or money. But her work went on, the noble seed took root, and in time the Nivedita Girls' School became a centre of light and an example to us."

This 'House of Sisters' became known to many not only as a school but as 'a centre of unfailing friendliness and succour'. The editor of *The Statesman*, Mr. S. K. Ratcliffe and his wife cycled down from Chowringhee every Sunday morning for breakfast. He wrote: "The Sundays in Bosepara Lane were a refreshment and a stimulus the memory of which is never likely to pass away. Breakfast was served with the extreme of simplicity on the little verandah, and the group would not break up until long after the morning sun had become too hot for a comfortable journey back through the blazing streets. Her house was a wonderful rendezvous. Not often did one meet a Western visitor, save at those times when an English or American friend would be making a stay in Calcutta; but nowhere else, so far as experience went, was there an opportunity of making acquaintance with so many interesting types of the Indian world. There would come members of Council and leaders in the public affairs of Bengal; Indian artists, men of letters, men of

science; orators, teachers, journalists, students; frequently a travelled member of the Order of Ramakrishna, occasionally a wandering scholar, not seldom a public man or leader of religion from a far province. The experience was beyond expression delightful, and its influence, you knew, was to be felt along many lines."

We cannot pass on without referring to some prominent persons who came in contact with Nivedita. Among her closest friends were the Boses, Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose and his wife Abala Bose. As early as 1898 Mrs. Bull and Nivedita met the Boses in Calcutta. Dr. Bose's researches on electrical waves had won him recognition in the West in 1897 and he was thereafter engaged in his researches on the Living and the Non-living. Both of them were extremely glad to meet him and see his laboratory. Nivedita had a talk with Mrs. Bose about her plan of work among the Indian women. Mrs. Bose had little hopes for her success in her educational efforts among the orthodox Hindu women and she told Nivedita so. But she was astonished beyond measure when she met Nivedita a few months later in the Bosepara Lane house and saw her school work. Her acquaintance grew into friendship and Nivedita was often invited by Mrs. Bose and other Brahmo ladies to talk to them on subjects like Educational Methods

In 1900 Dr. Bose was invited to the International Congress of Physics arranged at the Paris Exhibition. In that international gathering Dr. Bose read his paper on 'Response of Inorganic and Living Matter'. Both Swami Vivekananda and Nivedita attended the Congress and were happy and proud of Dr. Bose's achievements. Dr. Bose returned to England after the Congress and so did Nivedita. When immediately after, in December 1900, Dr. Bose fell ill and was operated upon, he was invited to stay during convalescence at Nivedita's mother's house in Wimbledon and there he was nursed back to health He returned to his work in the month of January.

It is well known how a section of British scientists rose against him and tried their utmost to undo his work. A regular tussle—'the Bose War' as Nivedita called it—ensued. Nivedita was a witness to the struggles of this lone Indian scientist against an

array of British scientists and, in utter disgust, she wrote in a letter:

> As for England, this 'Bose War' seems to spell individual and general degradation. I am sure if he were in England he would do much—he could not help doing much—but as far as she herself is concerned, England, or all that was noble in her, at least seems dead.

This was the reason why Nivedita took so much interest in Dr. Bose's work and stood by him in all his struggles. From Dr. Bose's case she understood clearly that Indians were nót incapable of doing great things, but were incapacitated by the British. With bitter reproach she said:

> Oh, India, India! who shall undo this awful doing of my nation to you? Who shall atone for the million bitter insults showered daily on the bravest and keenest nerved and best of all your sons?

When news reached Dr. Bose that some British scientists were playing foul with him, that his papers were not published but 'shelved' and stolen, he felt dejected. The only alternative left for him was to write books and make his work known, but he felt too depressed and tired to do that.

It was in this work that Nivedita came forward to help him. From 1902 onwards Nivedita engaged herself in revising and editing Dr. Bose's written work. From her personal notes and letters we come to know that between 1902 and 1907 she helped him in writing the following books: *Living and Non-Living*, *Plant Response* and *Comparative Electro-Physiology*. She also helped him in his book *Irritability of Plants* which was published later. Besides, she revised his miscellaneous papers regularly published in the *Philosophical Transaction*, a journal of the Royal Society.

When in Calcutta, Dr. Bose came to 17 Bosepara Lane everyday and the writing work went on. Devamata who had come to stay in Nivedita's house in 1909 wrote in her book *Days in an Indian Monastery* that "Literary work absorbed Sister Nivedita too profoundly to enable her to take part to any extent in teaching. She was occupied also in assisting the

famous botanist, Dr. J. C. Bose, in preparing a new book on plant life. He spent several hours every day at the school and sometimes lunched there. So, I had a delightful opportunity to know him."

Besides helping Dr. Bose in writing books, Nivedita sought financial help for their publication. Her friend Mrs. Bull was ready to spend for her, and Nivedita was keen on promoting the study of Science in India, so in a letter to Mrs. Bull written in 1906 she stated:

"To Science. The remaining £3000 of the bequest.... This is to be at the disposal of my friend and to be used by him preferably for two I shall name. But according to the best of his ability for Indian Science."

In 1910, praising Mrs. Bull for her munificence she wrote:

> You know this school is really yours, and my writings are really yours, and the science books are yours, the laboratory will be yours.... Don't you feel that it is a goodly array of things that you have made possible by your support. .. No, I must say that, used as you have used it, money seems to me a great and good thing.

Nivedita's desire was to see a Research Institute opened in India which would give the Indian scientists the necessary help to continue unhampered their scientific investigations. She very often discussed the possibility of such an institution with Dr. Bose. She did not live to see the day when in 1917 such an Institute—'not merely a laboratory but a temple'—was declared opened. But Dr. Bose had not forgotten her. In his opening speech he said, "In all my struggling efforts, I have not been altogether solitary. While the world doubted, there have been a few, now in the city of silence, who never wavered in their trust."

Professor Geddes wrote in Dr. Bose's biography: "Her firm faith in the long-dreamt-of Research Institute, its possibilities for Science and its promise for India was no small impulse and encouragement towards its realization; and thus is explained the memorial fountain with its bas-relief of 'woman carrying light to the temple' which adorns the entrance of his Institute."

Since 1902 Nivedita spent every holiday with the Boses, either

in India or outside, in Calcutta or at different hill stations. She had become a friend of the whole family. When she went to 93 Upper Circular Road, she spent the evenings reading English poetry or sometimes addressing small groups on subjects like 'Bodh-Gaya', 'Chitor', and 'Kanchi'. Mrs. Bose and Dr. Bose's sister, Labanyaprabha Bose, helped Nivedita by teaching in her school for some time.

Dr. Bose was senior in age to Nivedita and she greatly admired and respected him. She called him 'the Man of Science' but often referred to him as 'Bairn' for, in moods of dejection or defeat, he came to her to revive his cheer and courage.

In her last birthday greeting sent to Dr. Bose from Geneva in 1910, she wrote:

> When you receive this it will be our beloved 30th, the birthday of birthdays. May it be infinitely blessed—and may it be followed by many of ever-increasing sweetness and blessedness. Outside there is the great statue of Christopher Columbus and under his name only the words 'La Patrie' and I thought of the day to come when such words will be the speaking silence under your name. How spiritually you are already reckoned with him and all those other great adventurers who have sailed trackless seas to bring their people good.
>
> Be ever victorious! Be a light unto the people and a lamp unto their feet! And be filled with peace! You the great spiritual mariner who have found new worlds!

This long and fruitful friendship continued till Nivedita's death in 1911. Her early death was a great loss to him and for a long time he could not reconcile himself to the fact that Nivedita was no longer there to help him. In a letter to Miss MacLeod written in 1913 Christine wrote:

> Dr. Bose is much better physically and mentally, and one no longer has the fear that he may not be with us long. But life is so dull for him now. He constantly says, "I do not know how to pass my days." Margot gave him sympathy, understanding, enthusiasm, inspiration and help in his work. You can imagine what a void she left.

Rabindranath Tagore was another great friend of Dr. Bose, who, like Nivedita, stood by him in the days of his greatest trials. On the death of Dr. Bose in 1937, while addressing his students at Santiniketan he said:

"In the days of his struggles, Jagdish gained an invaluable energizer and helper in Sister Nivedita and in any record of his life's work, her name must be given a place of honour."

In his will Dr. Bose left one lakh of rupees for some memorial in Nivedita's name. Mrs. Bose spent the money in building a Nivedita Hall in the institution called the Bani Bhavan.

When Nivedita first saw Rabindranath in 1898, she was deeply impressed by his appearance, bearing, voice and language. Taking her to be like any other foreign missionary, he requested her to take charge of the education of his daughter and added that she should be educated in the manner of English girls. Nivedita refused to take up the responsibility for she was against imposing foreign ideals and standards upon children. She was convinced that children should be taught to aspire after their own national ideals. Rabindranath was surprised at first, but later attracted by her educational theories, he offered his house to her to conduct a normal school according to her ideas. Nivedita could not accept the offer as she was very busy with her own work. When she sent a batch of students on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas with Swami Sadananda, Rabindranath sent his son Ratindranath with them.

Rabindranath was struck, as most educated Indians were, by Nivedita's love for India and the Hindu religion It is said that it was Nivedita's deep respect and love for the Hindu religion and apathy towards the English that inspired him to depict the character of Gora in his novel of the same name.

Rabindranath often visited Nivedita at her Bosepara Lane house. He also accompanied her to Bodh Gaya in 1904. Nivedita learnt sufficient Bengali to appreciate his writings and translated his short story 'Cabuliwalla' into English.

Rabindranath spent most of his time at Silaidaha. In 1904, Nivedita went there with Dr. Bose. She was very happy to meet the villagers and to stay amongst them. When Rabindranath saw her among the villagers it gave him the opportunity of observing the greatness of her motherly heart and made

him remark. "We had not seen before an embodiment of the spirit of motherhood which, passing beyond the limits of the family, can spread itself over the whole country."

Though Sister Nivedita and Rabindranath met often, they never worked in collaboration at any time. Rabindranath has frankly written about it thus:

> I had felt her great power, but with all that I understood that her path was not for me. She was a versatile genius, and there was another thing in her nature: that was her militancy. She had power and she exerted that power with full force on the lives of others. When it was not possible to agree with her, it was impossible to work with her.

However, these differences in their mental make-up and methods of work never stood in the way of their friendship.

Paying a tribute to her at her death, the poet said he had no hesitation in admitting that on occasions when they had come in conflict, his thoughts had been subjected to relentless attacks by Nivedita's keen intellect, yet he now felt he had received benefits from her as from no one else and that he often gained strength on remembering her. He further said: "She is to be respected not because she was a Hindu but because she was great. She is to be honoured not because she was like us, but because she was greater than us."

One day, early in 1899, she had been to their house to meet Debendranath Tagore. He was pleased to meet her and expressed his desire to see Swami Vivekananda again, recalling that years before young Narendranath had one day clambered up into his boat and asked him anxious questions about God. Debendranath had patted him and had said he had a Yogi's eyes. Another day, therefore, Swami Vivekananda and Nivedita both went to see him.

The other members of the Tagore family with whom she was on friendly terms were Sarala Ghoshal and Abanindranath Tagore.

Sarala Devi's name has been mentioned before. She was an educated and accomplished lady, full of vigour and enthusiasm. She edited a magazine called *Bharati*. On his

return to India after his first visit to the West, Swami Vivekananda asked her to take up the cause of women's education according to his plans. For various reasons Sarala Devi could not immediately accept his proposal.

In one of his letters the Swami wrote to her, "If bold and talented women like yourself, versed in Vedanta, go to England to preach, I am sure that every year hundreds of men and women will be blessed by adopting the religion of the land of Bharata." That is why when the Swami went to the West a second time, he sent word to her through Nivedita to accompany him; but she did not go. In her reminiscences recently published, Sarala Devi writes: "In one of the letters written by him this idea was clearly expressed. It was not my good fortune then to avail myself of that valuable opportunity afforded to me My own unpreparedness and timidity and the objection raised by my elders prevented my going. Swamiji went away with Nivedita and she became the carrier of his message."

But Sarala Devi was a lover of her country and she had great respect for the Swami and the ideals for which the Mission stood; so when Nivedita returned to India in 1902, she wrote a letter to the Swami and requested Nivedita to forward it to him. In the covering letter to Nivedita she wrote: "My real love for my country, the wish to follow and take part in all its movements and activities, my interest in the Ramakrishna Mission all along, my faith in Swami Vivekananda's genius from the very first, it is these that have acted as the hidden springs for my offer."

What the offer was is not known to us and nothing definite took effect afterwards, for after Nivedita's return to India the Swami lived only for a very short time.

In 1902, the foremost authority on Oriental archaeology and art Mr. Kokasu Okakura came to India. A band of educated and cultured Bengali young men gathered round him. Many members of the Tagore family were of this group and so was Nivedita. This was where Abanindranath Tagore first met Nivedita. In his autobiography he has written: "I met her first at the house of the American Consul He had given a reception to Okakura and Nivedita had come there. She wore a full white gown covering her from neck to feet and

had a rosary of Rudraksha beads round her neck. She was, as it were, an image of a Tapasvini carved out of white marble. Okakura on one side, Nivedita on another—it seemed as if two stars had met from two spheres. How can I experss what I saw there!"

"I saw her a second time at a party of the Art Society at Justice Homewood's house. I was given the charge of sending out invitations. I had sent an invitation to Nivedita also. The party had begun. The whole place was crowded with so many rich people. Many well-dressed beautiful ladies were there. Nivedita came late in the evening. The same white dress, the rosary of Rudraksha beads round her neck and her brown hair tied in a high knot. When she came and stood there it seemed as if the moon had arisen among the stars. In a moment all the beautiful women paled into insignificance. The men started whispering. Woodroffe came and asked me who she was. I introduced him to Nivedita."

Abanindranath's sense of beauty differed from ordinary standards, that is why he often remarked, "I do not know whom you would call beautiful; to me she is the ideal." They had met in the field of art and not politics and in that field too her love and admiration for India could not remain unexpressed. Abanindranath said once: "Among all the foreigners who love India, Nivedita occupies the highest place."

Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal, the patriot-leader of India, echoed the same sentiment in his book, *The Soul of India.*

"Nivedita's self-effacement was almost complete. Even few Indians, especially of the modern educated classes, have as yet been inspired by so all-consuming a passion for India, as transformed this British woman. Nivedita came to us, as no European has as yet come, not as an adept, but as a novice; not as a teacher, but as a learner. She did not pose before us as a prophetess but always stood in sincere love and reverence as a worshipper."

Nivedita met Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal in Cambridge, Boston, at Mrs. Bull's house where both of them were staying as guests. In another book written in Bengali Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal has thus described how he became acquainted with Nivedita.

"At that time I first got acquainted with Miss Noble. It

was a wonderful acquaintance. In our astrology every person is assigned to a particular class, either of god, of human being or of devil. I do not know what was Nivedita's 'class', nor do I remember my own 'class'. But unfortunately since that first meeting, whenever we met, we quarrelled. It would not be wrong, therefore, to infer that she belonged to the 'god-class' and I to the 'devil-class'.

"I have heard from P. Mitra that whenever my name was mentioned Nivedita said: 'Have you ever observed the teeth of Pal? As soon as I see his teeth I find a tiger hidden behind them.' "

One day, in course of casual conversation during breakfast, the topic of the Brahmo Samaj crept up. Nivedita knew that Mr. Pal belonged to the Brahmo Samaj and yet without holding back her opinion, she started attacking it. The same evening at the house of a neighbour of Mrs. Bull, they again quarrelled. A third time, Nivedita was talking about India to some teachers when Mr. Pal was present. When the question of caste came up for discussion, Mr. Pal remarked that the caste system of the Hindus had paralysed men in India. Nivedita answered back: "That is not right. You are attacking the Hindus because you are a Brahmo." To her, who always held the Hindu scriptures and traditions sacred, Mr. Pal sarcastically said that if at the present time the Hindu scriptures had the same authority as in foregone days, Swami Vivekananda would not have been allowed to preach religion to Brahmins. Nivedita flared up: "It's a lie. The Swami has been accepted as the Guru of the Hindus." Mr Pal retorted: "Swami Vivekananda is not the Guru of the Hindus. The Hindu society has not accepted him as its Guru. He is only a religious and social reformer like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others." Nivedita could not brook this criticism of her Guru. She took it as a personal insult and said:

"You always insult us in every argument because we are women." Mr. Pal quietly said: "Rather I respect you because you are a woman. That is why though you called me a liar, I did not answer back."

When Mr. Pal saw that such quarrels were becoming a daily occurrence he left Mrs. Bull's house in order to avoid further unpleasantness and went away to New York.

A few days later, Mr. Pal was invited to an Annual Congress of Religions at Boston to speak on Hindu religion and philosophy. Here he met Nivedita again. When he spoke at the Congress about India's spiritual greatness, Nivedita was very happy. She forgot that he was a Brahmo. She even forgot that, a few days before, she had been angry with him for criticizing her Guru. All his faults were forgiven. Mr. Pal easily understood the reason for her changed attitude and could not help saying "I doubt whether any Indian loved India the way Nivedita loved her. We were in opposite camps in Mrs. Bull's house, but in this session of the Congress of Religions, having stood on the common platform of India, we became great friends. And even though we differed from each other in a hundred ways, our bond of friendship never snapped."

Later in India, when Mr. Pal started the weekly *New India*, Nivedita became one of its regular contributors. Her own desire to start a magazine had been abandoned on account of many difficulties but she wrote in many leading magazines and newspapers and thus came in contact with many journalists. In this connection she met Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee.

Mr. Kshiti Mohon Sen wrote that when in 1906 he met Nivedita in Banaras, he was surprised to hear her praise Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee's *Prabasi*, a magazine published in the Bengali language. She seemed to be quite conversant with the views published in the *Prabasi* and was aware of the editorial genius of Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee. He further wrote:

"Once, in the course of conversation, Nivedita said: 'A day will come when Ramananda Babu's writings will bear the tidings of the whole of India, though, at present, he thinks only of the Bengalee and the joys and sorrows of Bengal. God has blessed him with this gift and so great a gift cannot go futile. His genius and character will one day seek a wider scope of activity."

When the *Modern Review* was first published, Mr. Kshiti Mohon Sen remembered Nivedita's prophecy and was surprised at its fulfilment. Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee did not know Nivedita then. It was Dr. Bose who one day introduced Nivedita to him. Referring to this introduction he later wrote "That Sister Nivedita contributed articles, so full of insight and

dynamic power, to the *Modern Review* to the last year of her life, was due entirely to my being introduced to her by Sir J. C. and Lady Bose." Since the day they were introduced in 1907 till 1911, she was a regular contributor to the *Modern Review*. Even after her death, her articles entitled 'Star Pictures' were published in a series for some time. In her death the *Modern Review* and particularly its editor, Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee, suffered a great loss. Paying a tribute to her after her death he wrote:

> She was, if one may be pardoned a trite epithet, a born journalist. She wrote with brilliance, vigour and originality and, even on commonplace themes, with something like inspired fervour. She could write with great facility and on a great variety of topics, and could therefore comply with the requests of many editors for her paragraphs and articles. But nothing that she wrote was commonplace; even the most hackneyed topics were invested by her pen with new power and grace, and became connected with the first principles of human action and with the primal source of all strength. She could never be a hireling, she would either write on topics of her own choice and when the spirit moved her, or not write at all ..
>
> From the very birth of this *Review*, she helped us with her contributions and suggestions and in other ways in an uncommon measure. Her unsparing criticism, in private conversation, of our shortcomings and faults, was of no less advantage to us. The sense of the value of all this help is daily growing upon us, and we feel that we must not try to give it adequate expression. Would that all who are kindly were as unsparing in their criticism, and all who are severe critics as kindly and helpful as she! She was, indeed, a sister and she was *Nivedita*, dedicated to the service of all who came within the orbit of her life's way.

Nivedita never liked, and much less allowed, anyone to correct or rewrite her articles. But as she admired and respected Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee's views she gave him the

privilege of doing so. Nivedita had the power to convert others to her views. Mr. Chatterjee once remarked: "Besides writing letters, when we discussed this or that subject, it was she who was the speaker, and I the listener. Professor Bose used to laugh and say to me, 'She wants you to argue and then be defeated in argument by her, and then only she will be pleased.' Nivedita would smile at that remark. Although Nivedita was assertive and wished to press her views to the furthermost point of acceptance, she was always willing to help anyone who came forward to do something for the country.

Mr. Dinesh Sen was a resident of Baghbazar. He wrote *A History of the Bengali Language and Literature* in English and took it to Nivedita. He requested her to go through the entire manuscript and she agreed to do it.

Mr. Dinesh Sen was a timid and shy person who did not take much interest in politics. However, when he tried to express his views cautiously, Nivedita said: "Dinesh Babu, I will not discuss politics with you. That is not your field of action." At another time she said: "In my political views I differ from you completely. When I think of you from that standpoint your cowardliness only pains me and makes me ashamed. But still I like you. Would you like to know why? You have worked hard for your country and, unknowingly, you have proved yourself to be a true patriot. That is why I like you."

Mr. Dinesh Sen was overcome with awe and admiration at Nivedita's capacity for work. "Such labour of love cannot be bought for money," he wrote. They took one full year to go through the entire manuscript of Mr. Sen's book. Sometimes they worked on it from morning till 10 o'clock at night with hardly an interval of a few minutes. When the work was over, Nivedita requested Mr. Sen not to publicly mention her help. Mr. Sen was surprised at Nivedita's self-effacement and could not help saying: "I have only read in the *Gita* about selfless work, but have hardly come across anyone with detachment like hers. I recognized in her the ideal worker, working without expecting any kind of return."

It was not always easy for him to work with Nivedita. Sometimes while reading, discussions would start on literature, poetry or music. Discussion would turn into vigorous argument. Hours would pass by and not a line would be read.

Nivedita was only expected to correct the language; but, if any portion of the book was not to her liking, she would insist on the matter being altered. She would emphatically say: "Dinesh Babu, I will certainly not read your book any more if you do not alter this portion." In such circumstances, he was sometimes compelled to rewrite portions of his book. Nivedita's point was only this that, as the book was being written in English, it would be read by non-Indians and therefore it should not contain anything that would cast reflections on Indian society.

Therefore, in the story of Dhanapati, she objected to the inclusion of the fact that the innocent Khulna was punished by the people and the real culprit Lahana went scot-free. She said: "If you insert this part of the story, readers will criticize your people for their unfair judgement. No, no, no, you must not have it in your book. Do please omit it from your book."

But history must tell the truth, and on such occasions Mr. Dinesh Sen was in a dilemma. While reading the manuscript she would often strongly criticize the author, but he never took any offence. "Because, behind her angry words, I could feel her affectionate heart, soft as a petal." Sometimes she would highly praise him. She would say: "Dinesh Babu, you are really a great poet. You have written in prose, but your language is that of a poet. Your literary skill is really marvellous." Besides, in the presence of outsiders she always spoke very highly of him.

Sister Nivedita was a clear and vigorous thinker on sociology and economics. In many articles she emphasized that Indian political economy must be written from a point of view different from that of the West. It was this interest in Indian economics that brought the great economist Mr. Romesh Chandra Dutt and Nivedita so close. She was Mr. Dutt's god-daughter and as such she called him her god-father. He was in the service of the Baroda State and always strove to strike out new lines of progress and to develop new policies and reforms to carry the State forward. In politics he owed allegiance to the Liberal Party and disapproved of Nivedita's radical views.

Mr. R. C. Dutt helped Nivedita to learn Bengali and

Sanskrit. It was he who asked her to write books because she wielded a powerful pen. That was in 1900, when both of them were in England. She was there to collect funds for her school. He said writing would help her. His constant interest and encouragement helped her to write her first book *The Web of Indian Life* and she duly acknowledged her debt to him in her introductory note. Mr. Dutt had then retired from service and was writing his book on Economic History. Late in 1900 and and throughout 1901 Nivedita had the pleasure and privilege of seeing much of Mr. Dutt. Paying an eloquent tribute to him she wrote:

> One felt more and more, in his calm disinterestedness, in his loneliness and in his concentration, that as his forefathers had gone to the forest to live the life of the *Vanaprastha* for the development of the self, so here was one leading the same life in the forest of bricks and mortar for the development of his people.

In 1901 both Mr. Dutt and Nivedita were guests of Mrs. Bull in Norway. She later described how she spent the days with him.

> As his fellow-guest on one of the Norwegian fiords I remember how his only recreation consisted of the long evenings spent in boating or in music, and the hour after the forenoon sea-bathing, when he would come to the verandah to eat a little food, while one of us would read to the others the last instalment of his work. I have been awakened at night sometimes, to see the candle-light streaming through the half-open door, and catch a glimpse of the head bowed over its manuscript, at the other end of the great music room, where he had lain sleepless for hours and risen to work.

Nivedita used to recommend his book to many young students who wished to understand the problems of Indian economics.

Thus quite a few prominent men of the age came in close touch with Nivedita. Sir Gurudas Banerjee, Sir Rashbehari

Ghosh, Mr. Brojendranath Seal, Mr. P. C. Ray, Mr. Aswini Kumar Dutt, Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, Mr. Ananda Mohan Bose, Mr. Motilal Ghosh, Mr. Girish Chandra Ghosh, Mr. Shyam Sunder Chakraborty, Mr. Bhupendranath Bose, Sir Taraknath Palit, Mr. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Mr. Surendranath Banerjee, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu—all came to know her and appreciate her love for their country.

With the young men unknown to fame, Nivedita was very popular. She was a 'Guru' to all of them who took part in the national movement. The young revolutionaries like Bhupendranath Dutt, Barin Ghosh and Taraknath Das received help from her. It was to express his respect towards her that Mr. Taraknath Das dedicated his book *Japan and Asia* to Nivedita. Many a young scholar and artist, scientist, professor and historian received help from her.

Till his last days Sir Jadunath Sarkar reverentially remembered his trip to Bodh Gaya with her. She told him once: "Never lower your flag to any foreigner. In whatever department of life you work, try to be pre-eminent in it, try not to have to bow to a foreign authority or copy a foreign model. Keep this spirit alive in your heart." He always remembered those words in later life.

When the young historian Mr. Radhakumud Mukherjee was doing research in Indian history she wrote to him a note on historical research. While giving this note for publication, in his introductory remarks he said:

"The example which that life afforded of sincerity, earnestness and self-sacrifice in the pursuit of its lofty ideals is rare in any age or clime. As unfolding to some extent the real spirit which animated the life and work of the saintly Sister, the following publication will, I hope, be of some interest."

Among the young artists of the Calcutta School, Nandalal Bose, Surendranath Ganguly, Asit Kumar Haldar and others came under the direct influence of Nivedita and they admitted their indebtedness to her for inspiration, encouragement and help.

She had friends in Dr. Coomaraswamy, Mr. Natesan, Sri Srinivas Iyengar and Mr. Padshaw. The famous Tamil poet Subrahmanya Bharati held Nivedita in great respect and said that Nivedita was his guide in spiritual life. By contributing to

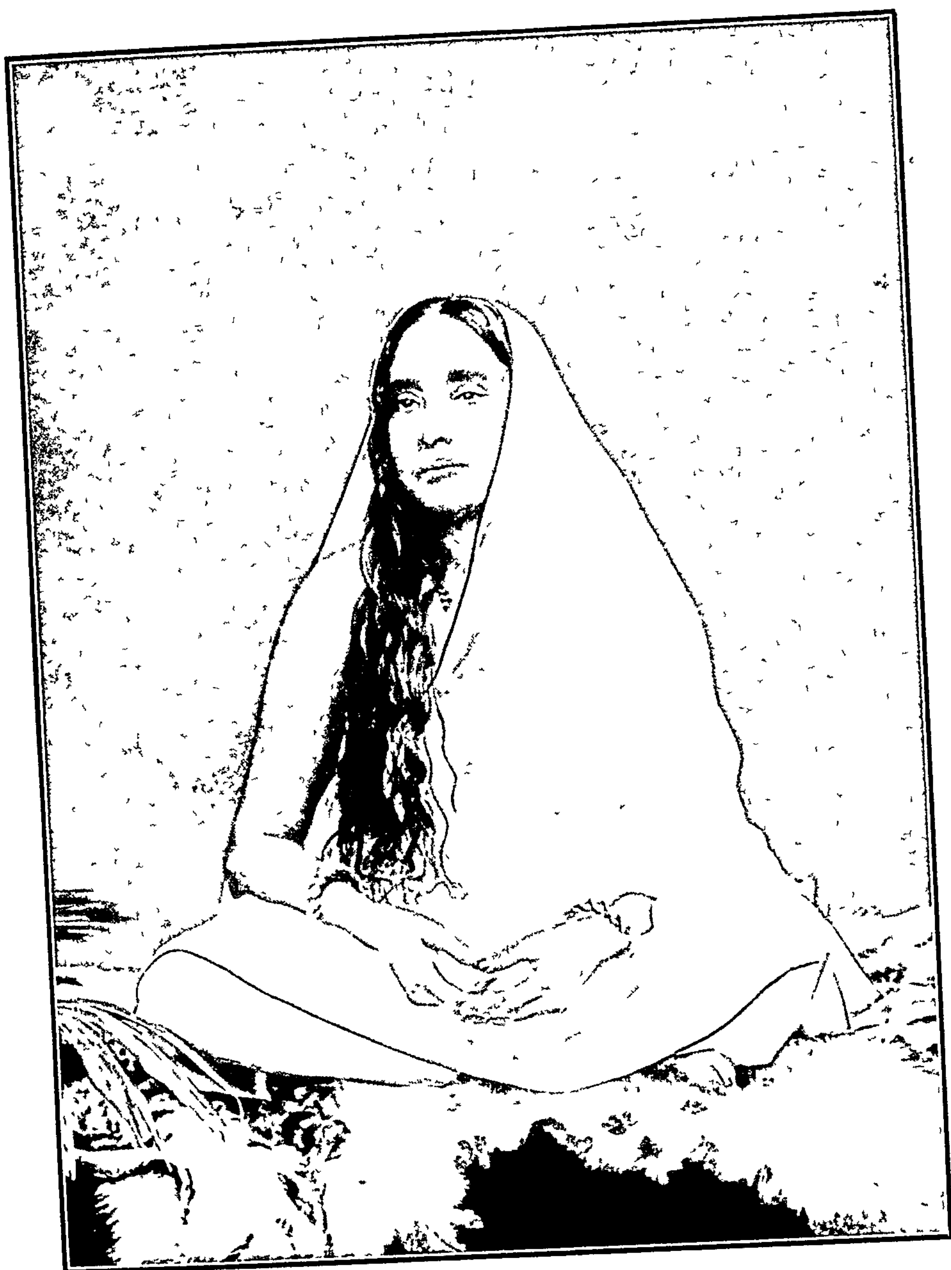
various Indian journals, magazines and newspapers she had become known all over India. She contributed to Subrahmanya Bharati's *Bal Bharat* occasionally.

She considered herself an Indian, therefore, she did not like anyone referring to her as a foreigner. When Subrahmanya Bharati came to attend the Calcutta Congress in 1906, he went to meet Nivedita. He said he felt that though Sister Nivedita was the Swami's disciple, she was a foreigner. Nivedita understood the feeling; so, she quietly asked him to get rid of this narrow feeling of religion, caste and creed and get the separatist tendency out of his mind.

It was not that Nivedita did not mix with Englishmen and other foreigners in this country. She did, and had quite a few friends amongst them too. Among these mention may be made of Mr. S. K. Ratcliffe, editor of *The Statesman*, Mr. A. J. F. Blair, Mr. E. B. Havell, Principal of the Government Art School and Mr. F. J. Alexander. Mr. Ratcliffe first met Nivedita under strange circumstances. He was a newcomer to India, having joined the staff of *The Statesman* only a few weeks before. A European lady had invited some English ladies and gentlemen and a few Indians, mostly members of the Brahmo Samaj, to meet Nivedita. "The whole affair was strange—the afternoon gathering, the meeting of West and East, and this Western voice speaking to Europeanised Indians of the greatness and enduring beauty of the customs and ideals from which they had cut themselves adrift."

Her address at this meeting was naturally not a success, but it made a deep impression on Mr. Ratcliffe. His friendship with Nivedita helped him, as it later helped many other other Westerners to understand India better. Among many such was Dr. T. K. Cheyne of Oxford. He was fascinated with her book *The Web of Indian Life*, for never before had he seen India described from the inside. He wrote her a warm letter and enquired as to the best source of information on Hindu religion at its best. In answer, she mentioned the *Bhagvad Gita* and the lectures of Swami Vivekananda. "This produced," said Dr. Cheyne, "a revolution in my view of the capacity of Hindu religion for adapting itself progressively to the spiritual needs of Indians, and for contributing elements of enormous value to the purification, enrichment, and reinterpretation of

Christianity.. . Sister Nivedita was well aware that I looked for help to the Aryan East, and especially to her and her Master, and this may have been the chief reason why she paid me in the dazzling coin of affection, reverence, and gratitude for the sympathy which I delighted to express to her."



The Holy Mother

44. *With the Holy Mother*

NOT TO MAKE special mention of Nivedita's relations with the Holy Mother would be to omit an important and vital chapter in Nivedita's life in India. Since that blessed day in 1899, on which Nivedita first saw the Holy Mother her heart was drawn towards her. It has been mentioned before how the Holy Mother's kindness had made Nivedita's stay in the orthodox Hindu quarters of Baghbazar both possible and easy. Even after leaving the Ramakrishna Order, their relations remained unchanged.

Whenever the Holy Mother came to Calcutta, she paid a visit to Nivedita's school. Nivedita would consider it a festive occasion and decorate the gates with auspicious leaves and flowers. She would supervise the cleaning of the rooms and ask the girls to offer flowers at her feet. She would bow low to the Mother as soon as she alighted from the carriage.

Nivedita, too, made it a point to go to the Mother's house whenever possible. Before leaving Calcutta for any other place, she went as a rule to the Mother for her blessings. The Mother addressed Nivedita as 'my child' and she was Nivedita's 'Beloved Mother'. She looked upon the Holy Mother as an embodiment of motherhood, which she describes eloquently as: "A yearning love that can never refuse us; a benediction that for ever abides with us. a presence from which we cannot grow away; a heart in which we are always safe, sweetness unfathomed, bond unbreakable, holiness without a shadow—all these indeed and more is motherhood."

She became like a child of five when she sat by the Mother. Lovingly and longingly she would look at the Mother and a smile from her was sufficient to gladden her heart. Her devotion and love were expressed in small services rendered to the Mother. Joyfully would she take the Mother's sitting mat, kiss it often and dust it before spreading it for her to sit upon. In the glare of light she would be eager to shade her eyes.

She noted down in her diary the days on which she met her. On the 14th of February, 1904, the Holy Mother came to Calcutta and Nivedita met her on the 24th. The same day she wrote to Miss MacLeod:

> The Holy Mother is here, so small, so thin, so dark, worn-out physically, I should say, with village hardship and village life. But the same clear mind, the same stateliness, the same womanhood, as before; oh, how many comforts I would like to take to her. She needs a soft pillow, a shelf, a rug, so many things She is so crowded with people about her always. I would like to give her a beautiful picture, a piece of bright colours. But I suppose one must wait.

Though she desired to offer gifts and presents to the Mother Nivedita never could do so because she had no money. When she returned from the West in 1909, she brought a few presents for her and Radhu. The Mother treasured whatever she received from Nivedita. Once she had given her a small german-silver box in which the Mother kept Sri Ramakrishna's hair and said, "When I worship it, I will remember Nivedita." A scarf presented by Nivedita was carefully preserved by her in a trunk even after it was in rags and if someone suggested that it might be thrown away she said "Don't throw it away Let it be. Nivedita lovingly gave it to me. I am reminded of her whenever I see it. What a wonderful person she was! In the beginning she could not talk with me but later she learnt Bengali."

The Mother made a woollen fan for Nivedita and presented it to her. On receiving it Nivedita was in ecstasy. "How beautiful! how splendid!" she exclaimed, pressing it to her forehead and heart again and again. On seeing her joy at such a trivial present, the Mother said: "See how glad she is at receiving such a trifle. What faith! What goodness! How devoted she is to Naren! Because Naren was born in this country, she left her home and came to this far-off land to do his work. Mark her devotion for her Guru and love for India!"

The Mother's concern for Nivedita's welfare and her keen

interest in her work was always a source of strength and inspiration to her. In 1900, while she was busy in America collecting funds for her school and for the proposed Home for girls, the Mother wrote to her a letter which read:

> My dear love to you, baby daughter Nivedita, I am so glad to learn you have prayed to the Lord for my eternal peace. You are a manifestation of the everblissful Mother. I look at your photo, which is with me, every now and then and it seems as if you are present with me. I long for the day and the year when you shall return. May the prayers you have uttered for me from the depth of your pure virgin soul be true! I am well and happy. I always pray to the Lord that He might help you in your noble efforts and keep you strong and happy. I pray too for your quick return. May He fulfil your desires about the Women's Home in India and may that Home fulfil its mission in teaching true religion to all
>
> He, the breath of the Universe, is singing His own praise and you are hearing that eternal song through things that will come to an end. The trees, the birds and hills and all are singing praise to the Lord. The Banian of Dakshineswar sings of Kali to be sure and blessed is he who has ears to hear it . .
>
> My dear love to you and blessings and prayers for your spiritual growth. You are doing excellent work indeed. But do not forget your Bengali, else I will not be able to understand you when you come back. It gave me such a delight to learn that you are speaking of Dhruva, Savitri, Sita, Rama, etc. The accounts of their holy lives are better than all the vain talks of the world, I am sure. Oh! how beautiful is the name and doings of the Lord!
>
> Yours,
> Mother.

The Mother had written the letter in Bengali which Swami Saradananda translated into English and sent it to her together with the original. It appears from this letter that even when

Nivedita was in foreign lands her thoughts were with the Holy Mother and, like a child, she gave all news about herself and her work to her.

Like the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna Nivedita was aware of the spiritual greatness and sainthood of the Holy Mother. One day in 1910 when Mrs. Bull was very ill, she went to a church in Boston. There she saw Mother as the Madonna. On her return home, she noted down in her diary: "Went to church. Saw Sarada Devi as Madonna. Her presence will sanctify" and wrote a letter to her immediately.

Beloved Mother:

This morning, early, I went to church—to pray for Sara. All the people there were thinking of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and suddenly I thought of you. Your dear face, and your loving look, and your white Sari and your bracelets. It was all there. And it seemed to me that yours was the presence that was to soothe and bless poor S. Sara's sick-room. And—do you know?—I thought I had been very foolish to sit in your room, at the evening service to Sri Ramakrishna, trying to meditate. Why did I not understand that it was quite enough to be a little child at your dear feet? Dear Mother! you are full of love! And it is not a flushed and violent love, like ours, and like the world's but a gentle peace that brings good to everyone and wishes ill to none. It is a golden radiance, full of play. What a blessed Sunday that was, a few months ago, when I ran in to you, the last thing before I went on the Ganges, and ran back to you for a moment, as soon as I came back! I felt such a wonderful freedom in the blessing you gave me, and in your welcome home! Dearest Mother—I wish we could send you a wonderful hymn, or a prayer. But somehow even that would seem too loud, too full of noise! Surely you are the most wonderful thing of God—Sri Ramakrishna's own chalice of His Love for the world—a token left with His children, in these lonely days, and we should be very still and quiet before you—except indeed for a little fun! Surely the wonderful things of God are all quiet—stealing unnoticed into our lives—the air and the

sunlight and the sweetness of gardens and of the Ganges, these are the silent things that are like you!

Do send to poor S. Sara the mantle of your peace. Isn't your thought, now and then, of the high calm that neither loves nor hates? Isn't that a sweet benediction that trembles in God, like the dew-drop on the lotus-leaf, and touches not the world?

Ever, my darling Mother, your foolish Khooki
Nivedita

The Swami had invited Nivedita to come to India and work for the women of this country. It was natural therefore that she thought deeply on the ideals of Indian womanhood, the problems of Indian women, their position in society, and their education. She always considered the Holy Mother with all her sweetness, wisdom, purity and sanctity to be the ideal woman. At one place she wrote: "To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an older order, or the beginning of a new?"

Nivedita had deeply studied the problems of Indian women and was certain of their great future. Since she first came to stay at Baghbazar she was struck by the Indian women—shy, retiring, gentle, proud and dignified. Their manners and bearing were quite in contrast to the aggressiveness of the women of the West. She saw an undreamt-of beauty in their forms and manners, an unthought-of religious training and culture of mind and heart. Was she to teach them or was she to learn from them? Gradually she understood that their ideals were rooted in thousands of years of Hindu culture and any educational effort to be made must begin at their standpoint and help them to development in their own ways. This made her say with conviction that "There can never be any sound education of the Indian woman, which does not begin and end in exaltation of the national ideals of womanhood, as embodied in her own history and heroic literature."

After having studied India she could say that "She is, above all others, the land of great women. Wherever we turn, whether to history or literature, we are met on every hand by those

figures, whose strength she mothered and recognized, while she keeps their memory eternally sacred."

It was because of this understanding that within a few months of contact with them, she became a champion of Indian women In America, England or Europe—whenever she lectured, she spoke about Indian women and held the banner of Indian ideals of womanhood aloft, more because the Christian missionaries had told fantastic stories about the ignorance and oppression of the women of this country. After returning to India from the West in 1902, in her first speech at Madras, she said:

> To all who make this statement we may answer that Indian women are certainly not oppressed. The crime of ill treating women is at once less common and less brutal in form here than in younger countries. And the happiness, the social importance, and may I say, the lofty character of Indian women are amongst the grandest possessions of the national life.
>
> When we come to the charge that Indian women are ignorant, we meet with a far deeper fallacy. They are ignorant in the modern form, that is to say, few can write, and not very many can read. Are they then illiterate? If so the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and the *Purana* stories every mother and every grand-mother tells to the babies, are not literature. But European novels and the Strand Magazine are. Can anyone accept this paradox? The fact is, writing is not culture though it is an occasional result of culture. The greatest literature occurs at the beginning of a literary age and, so, to those who know Indian life, it is easy to see that an Indian woman, who has the education of the Indian home—the dignity, the gentleness, the cleanliness, the thrift, the religious training, the culture of mind and heart which that home-life entails—though she cannot perhaps read a word of her own language, much less sign her name, may be infinitely better educated in every true sense and in literary sense also, than her glib critic.

It may be asked then why did Nivedita make efforts to

educate Indian women? Why did she bother about the future education of Indian women? The answer is given by herself:

> The fact is, by the education of women we mean today her civilization. The problem of the age, for India, as we have constantly insisted, is to supersede the family, as a motive, and even as a form of consciousness, by the *civitas*, the civic and national unity. This cannot be done by men as men alone. It is still more necessary that it should be done by women.

Without education this was not possible. Due to the impact of Western civilization, Indian women had entered the portals of universities. But the education they received was neither national nor creative. It only taught women to give up their ideals of life and be influenced by Western thought and civilization. Nivedita was against it.

> Have the Hindu women of the past been a source of shame to us, that we should hasten to discard their old-time grace and sweetness, their gentleness and piety, their tolerance and child-like depth of love and pity, in favour of the first crude product of Western information and social aggressiveness?

"That education which only taught reading and writing was no education. The power to use them was more important. The woman in whom education did not awaken national consciousness, the woman who did not learn to understand national history, the woman who had no notion of what her country was like, was not truly and deeply educated", said Sister Nivedita. A synthetic development of mind and heart was essential, especially in the case of woman, because in her care lay the synthesis of life. It was Nivedita's firsthand knowledge of the Indian women that helped her to interpret the ideals of Indian womanhood to the West. Her interpretation was not mere theory, for, for long years she herself had practised the discipline of self-denial, self-sacrifice and contemplation that characterize the Indian women. Rightly has it been said of her that "By her birth in the West, and her life and

death in India, she has enriched the world in a twofold way. She brought to the exquisite ideals of Indian womanhood the intellectual robustness and the modern outlook which are the heritage of Europe. She interpreted to the West the nobility and the sanctity which attend the Indian woman in her home"

She was full of hope that in future the women of India would rise to their full stature and bring glory to their motherland.

> It is essential for the joyous revealing of that great Mother, that she be first surrounded by the mighty circle of these, Her daughters, the Indian women of the days to come. It is they who must consecrate themselves before Her, touching Her feet, with their proud hands, and vowing, to her their own, their husbands' and their children's lives Then and then only will she stand crowned before the world. Her sanctuary today is full of shadows. But when the womanhood of India can perform the great Arati of nationality, that temple shall be all light, nay, the dawn verily shall be near at hand.

45. *Life, Literature and Art*

WHENEVER ANYONE ASKED NIVEDITA who she was and what she was doing in India she replied she was a teacher. The answer was not incorrect. She began by teaching the alphabet to young girls in a school and ended by teaching the alphabet of nationality, love and service to young and old alike. She was conscious of the richness of Indian life in all its elements and wanted to rouse the children of the soil to that consciousness. She did not consider herself worthy of that task, but she tried with heart and will and her attempts were not unsuccessful.

It is difficult to portray the extraordinary personality of Nivedita. In appearance she was tall and fair. Clad in a white silk gown with a rosary of Rudraksha beads around her neck, she naturally drew the attention of everyone. But more arresting was her countenance. She is described by Mr. A. J. F. Blair thus: "A tall, robust woman in the very prime of life. Her face in repose was almost plain. The cheekbones were high and the jaws were square. The face at the first glance expressed energy and determination, but you would hardly have looked at it again but for the forehead and the eyes. The eyes were a calm, deep blue, and literally lit up the whole countenance. The forehead was broad rather than high, and was surmounted by a semi-Indian Sari, fastened to the abundant brown hair. In animation the face and its expression were transfigured, in sympathy with the rich, musical voice."

The artist Abanindranath Tagore considered her to be an ideal of beauty and said that he visualized her as the meditating Uma.

On her face always shone the radiance of purity and righteousness. Her bright eyes showered love and shot anger as occasions arose. Mr. Nevinson beautifully says: "It is as vain to describe Sister Nivedita in two pages as to reduce fire to a formula and call it knowledge. There was,

indeed, something flame-like about her, and not only her language but her whole vital personality often reminded me of fire. Like fire, and like Shiva, Kali, and other Indian powers of the spirit, she was at once destructive and creative, terrible and beneficent. There was no dull tolerance about her, and I suppose no one ever called her gentle. Even with friends her disagreement could be vehement, and her contradiction was very direct In the face of the enemy her eyes turned to glowing steel, and under anger they deepened in colour, like Garibaldi's. Her scorn of presumptuous ignorance and her indignation at wrong were blasting. I do not doubt that rage lacerated her own heart, but she withered the enemy up. No one would call her gentle. But of all nobly sympathetic natures, she was amongst the finest"

Combined thus with a keen intellect was a noble heart. There was no one who was not filled with admiration and reverence for this noble personality. Her work proves her greatness, but stray instances of life throw light upon the fullness of her personality and therefore become interesting. A few instances are given below.

It was not in Nivedita's nature to tolerate weakness of any kind. Mr. Dinesh Chandra Sen was her friend, but his cowardliness and timidity always irritated her. She did not desist from calling him a coward and a weakling. One day he proved himself to be a coward indeed. It was evening when, with Gonen Maharaj and Mr. Dinesh Sen, Nivedita walked towards the river bank Mr. Sen was in front of Nivedita and Gonen Maharaj behind her. Suddenly a bull came rushing towards them. In order to save himself from the attack of the bull, Mr. Sen immediately ran away, not thinking for a moment that in doing so he had left Nivedita to face the danger. Gonen Maharaj immediately came forward and drove the bull away, which was rushing headlong towards Nivedita. When the danger passed, Mr. Sen joined them only to be sharply rebuked by Nivedita: "Dinesh Babu, your bravery has brightened the race of men today. You saved your life by leaving an unprotected lady to face an angry bull. Your action will become a fit memorial to your courage no doubt." Poor Dinesh had no reply to make.

Ill manners and insolence equally irritated her. Mr. Gokul

Das Dey speaks of his own experience. When he was a young boy he had been to the Udbodhan office with his elder brother to see the Holy Mother. Nivedita was there too. After meeting the Mother, Nivedita and Gokul's brother sat on the staircase near the threshold discussing serious questions of philosophy and religion. After a while Gokul came from within and, passing between them, reached the door. Remembering, however, that he had forgotten his umbrella, he once again passed between them and entered the house. Nivedita did not like this. While she was returning home, she told an elderly gentleman, Mr. Mahendranath Gupta, about Gokul's bad manners. Gokul was within hearing distance. He heard Nivedita angrily saying, "We ought to hammer him." When Nivedita turned towards her school building, Mr. Mahendranath Gupta called Gokul to his side and said: "Nivedita is angry with you. You see, it is discourtesy to pass between elders when they are talking. You should have politely excused yourself every time you passed between them." Gokul meekly said, "I would have apologized when I saw she was angry; but I was afraid because she said she would hammer me." Mr. Gupta laughed aloud and said she did not mean it literally, she only meant that he should be taught a lesson.

However, young Gokul's fear did not leave him. He took care to avoid Nivedita. One day, while he was passing through a lane, he saw Nivedita coming. He was about to enter a side alley to avoid meeting her when Nivedita smilingly approached him and patting him affectionately on the back said: "Don't be angry with me. Am I not your elder sister? You are so thin. Don't read much. First, become strong physically. Go to the field and play games. Do you understand me? You will not be able to do anything if you do not build up your physique."

Gokul was surprised and wondered whether this was the person of whom he was so afraid.

Nivedita's indignation at wrong and her fiery response were always prompt. Early one morning, she was seen walking on the strand at Baghbazar. A neighbour greeted her and asked her if it was her habit to take early morning walks. She replied in the negative, but explained that some ladies had complained

to her that certain rogues always insulted them when they went to the river for their morning ablutions. That was why she had decided to go with them to see that it did not happen again.

When undue deference was shown to her anywhere because she was a foreigner, she did not like it. Once when she was in Lahore, she expressed her desire to her host to go round the city. She preferred to walk than to move about in a carriage, for that would prevent her from entering narrower lanes. At one place Ram-lila was going on. Nivedita wanted to see what was happening. Seeing an English lady coming that way, the policeman on duty started hustling the people and pushing them aside to make a passage for her. The host writes: "In an instant Sister Nivedita's smiling demeanour changed. The blood rushed to her face and her eyes flashed indignant fire; going up to the policeman she exclaimed, 'What right have you to push these people? You should be run in for assault.' She spoke in English, because she did not know his language. The policeman did not understand her words, but there was no mistaking her gesture and look. The man turned to me for an explanation and when he got it, he shrank away, looking sheepish and crest-fallen."

She was a 'sister' and she preferred to be called so. One day a Punjabi Aryasamajist preacher plied her with all sorts of controversial questions as he had been accustomed to treat Christian missionaries. Nivedita bore it patiently. But when he addressed her as 'Madam Sahiba', she replied in a pained voice, "I shall be much more pleased if you call me Sister."

One of the chief reasons why Nivedita could suffer privations uncomplainingly was that she saw much more suffering around her. Her heart always went out to others and she often deprived herself of comforts to help the needy. One day in winter, while she herself was shivering from cold, she gave away her cloak to her servant, thinking that his need was greater than hers. She herself narrated how during her first voyage to India she had met on board the steamer a young Englishman. He was a difficult problem at home and his parents had packed him off to India. Everyone was annoyed with him for his obnoxious manners. But Nivedita thought differently. Pity swelled in her

heart for the poor boy who had been cut off from the influences and restraints of home. She met him one day and presented to him a gold watch saying it was the only valuable thing she possessed, a birthday gift from her mother. She requested him to keep it with him as a memento of one who believed in his being able to build up his life. A year later Nivedita received a letter from the boy's mother telling her about the death of her son and how he had been helped through her to choose a new and better way of life and how he had remembered her till the last day of his life.

Mr. Ratcliffe says, "Those to whom she gave the ennobling gift of her friendship knew her as the most perfect of comrades, while they hold the memory of that gift as this world's highest benediction. They think of her years of sustained and intense endeavour, of her open-eyed and impassioned search for truth, of the courage that never quailed, the noble compassionate heart; they think of her tending the victims of famine and plague, or ministering day by day among the humble folk with whom her lot was cast; putting heart into the helpless and defeated, showing to the young and perplexed the star of a glowing faith and purpose, royally spending all the powers of a rich intelligence and an overflowing humanity for all who called upon her in their need. And some among them count it an honour beyond all price that they were permitted to share, in however imperfect a measure, the mind and confidence of this radiant child of God."

Nivedita became known to a much wider circle of people through her books. Her literary talents helped her to write with ease on a great variety of subjects. We find a fine vein of deep mature reflection, without pedantry or bias, in all her writings, and they are written with such sincerity and earnestness that we cannot treat them as mere literary efforts. Though a polished diction and cultured style characterize her writings, their peculiar charm is their intense suggestiveness.

Her books may be roughly divided into biographical, interpretative and narrative. Among the biographical can be included *The Master As I Saw Him*, *Notes of Some Wanderings With the Swami Vivekananda* and *Kedarnath and Badrinarayan: A Pilgrim's Diary*.

When Nivedita took up writing *The Master As I Saw Him*

in 1905 she realized what a difficult task it was. "Oh, to have written the life of Swamiji! To be properly written, 'the life' should be *all* Swamiji. He should move through it, like Jesus through the Gospels, alone, unfettered, unshadowed. But I feel incapable of this, and capable only of telling what I have seen in him." It was a real Sadhana for her and as she proceeded she felt the inspiration flowing within her. After writing a few chapters she hopefully said, "Of course, I know that, if I succeed, it will be *the* work of my life, the one thing, in fact, that I have to give. And I feel more and more that all that training was not really given to me, but to all the Indian generations through me, in some way. I am trusting, trusting, trusting that *he* will guide my hand, line by line, that I might write down more aspects of him that are Eternal, and be able to discard remorselessly all the rest."

In beautiful verse, written by Mr. F. J. Alexander after her death, is described the fulfilment of her Sadhana:

> Gone now the toil which was her aspiration
> Her Master's Message the whole wide world to give.
> The written Page alone outlives the time
> Her Spirit's fleeing to another world,
> But Page, inspired, prophetic, resonant
> With all she heard and saw and loved
> In the Presence of that Light which was her God,
> Reflected in "The Master as I Saw Him".

She took five years to complete the book and on February 1, 1910, on Swami Vivekananda's birthday, she took a bound volume and placed it reverentially in his room. It was acclaimed as a masterpiece in the literary world. Prof. T. K. Cheyne in his review of the book in the *Hibbert Journal* (January, 1911) wrote: "It may be placed among the choicest religious classics, below the various Scriptures, but on the same shelf with the *Confessions of Saint Augustine* and Sabatier's *Life of Saint Francis*."

Notes of Some Wanderings With the Swami Vivekananda is a record of her travels with her Guru in Almora and Kashmir in 1898. It is in the form of a diary wherein the thoughts and impressions of Swami Vivekananda are jotted down. *Kedarnath*

and Badrinarayan is written in the same style. She wrote it after her return from the pilgrimage in 1910. The beauty of these two small books is that, though her style is subjective, there is very little of herself in the book.

Kali the Mother was Nivedita's first book that was published. Two of its chapters 'The Story of Kali' and 'The Vision of Shiva' were written in India while the rest of the book was written in America in 1899. It was published in 1900 and was favourably reviewed. It cannot be called biographical though it contains biographical accounts of two Hindu saints. Her interpretation of Kali, the Goddess, is her own contribution to the theological and philosophical ideas of the Hindus. The same thing can be said of her *Siva and Buddha* and *An Indian Study of Love and Death*. All the three are written in beautiful poetic prose.

The two articles of Nivedita, *Lambs Among Wolves* and *Aggressive Hinduism,* which were later published in book form, were meant to counteract the half-truths and untruths about Indian social life spread in the West by Christian missionaries for their selfish ends. The defiant and aggressive note of the articles speaks of Nivedita's authority, knowledge and conviction. These two articles together with *The Web of Indian Life* and *Studies from an Eastern Home* attracted much attention as being systematic attempts to reveal the inner life of India. The sweetness of the Hindu way of life and the wide survey of women as they live and think in different parts of India reveal to many Indians themselves the wealth of interest and romance that lie hidden in their homes. The intense sympathy, kindness and love of Nivedita for India animates every sentence in the books.

Of these two books special mention may be made of the former, *The Web of Indian Life*. Nivedita first undertook to write the book in 1900 when she was in England. Mr. Romesh Chandra Dutt took great interest in her work and she wrote the first few chapters in England and Norway. The book was finally brought to light in 1904. It was regarded as an epoch-making book and received world-wide celebrity within a few days of its publication. Almost all the leading newspapers, magazines and journals in India, England and America reviewed it, most of them favourably, some bitterly. Whether

it was reviewed favourably or not, one thing was certain, that it attracted, on its own merits, widespread and serious attention as a book of revelation. As the reviewer of a London journal wrote: "It is possible that the Western women who read about their Hindu sisters will have to readjust their ideas after reading Miss Noble's book. It would be well if those who gather their impressions of our Indian Empire solely from missionaries of preconceived ideas and little sympathy, or from the abstruse works of scholars, or the chatter of Anglo-Indians, were to revise the impressions they gathered from their sources by the light of this poetically written and scholarly book."

The missionaries, as it could be easily understood, were angry at the publication of this book and redoubled their efforts to prove that it presented a picture idealized out of all relation to facts. Miss Amy Wilson Carmichael, a missionary lady, immediately after published a book entitled *Things as They Are* with the sole object of undoing Nivedita's work. Nivedita was aware of the reaction of the missionaries In a letter written to Miss MacLeod on February 2, she said: "We are beginning to have counter-blasts from the missionaries now to the book. Sometimes they are very funny, and always they express more than the poor author suspects. It is for *India* to understand my book, and make the world admit that it is not half in truth."

The strength and inspiration behind all the works of Nivedita was always Swami Vivekananda and more than once she expressed that sentiment But when this book received such universal acclamation she could not but feel moved, and with deep emotions wrote to Miss MacLeod:

> If, when you do dip into it, you recognize Swami at all, you will give me great happiness. I have worked for others as a hand or a tool, but Swami demanded the whole of my powers, and left me to use them for him Both kinds of service, all kinds of service, are great and good, but this alone is all absorbing, because this alone implies perfect faith.
>
> Suppose Swami had not come to London that time! Life would have been like a headless torso. For I always

knew that I was waiting for something, I always said that a call would come, and it did—now I look at the book and say 'If he had not come!' for always I had this burning voice within, but nothing to utter. How often and often I have sat down, pen in hand, to speak, and there was no speech, and now there is no end to it! Assuredly as I am fitted for my world, so surely is my world in need of me, waiting, ready.

The other interpretative books are all collections of her writings scattered in various newspapers and magazines. Thus *Religion and Dharma* contains the 'Occasional Notes' written by her in the *Prabuddha Bharata*. *Civic and National Ideas* is a small collection of short essays on civicism, nationality, art and other topics. It was published in May 1919. *Hints on National Education in India* contains stimulating essays on national education, practical educational projects and educational needs of women and children.

In the *Footfalls of Indian History* are collected some historical essays. In dedicating the book to Mother India, Nivedita wrote:

THE FOOTFALLS

We hear them, O Mother!
  Thy footfalls,
Soft, soft, through the ages
  Touching earth here and there,
And the lotuses left on Thy footprints
  Are cities historic,
Ancient scriptures and poems and temples,
  Noble strivings, stern struggles for Right.

Where lead they, O Mother!
    Thy footfalls?
O grant us to drink of their meaning!
  Grant us the vision that blindeth
  The thought that for man is too high.
Where lead they, O Mother!
    Thy footfalls?

Approach Thou, O Mother, Deliverer!
Thy children, Thy nurslings are we!
On our hearts be the place for Thy stepping,
Thine own, Bhumyâ Devi, are we.
Where lead they, O Mother!
Thy footfalls?

Among the narratives are *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* and *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*. Both the books are narrations of stories from the Hindu Epics, the *Puranas* and Buddhist literature. The style is simple, but the books have abiding interest. During her first visit to America Nivedita had taken up the programme of taking children's classes in schools and telling them stories from the Hindu literature. These stories were finally collected in these two books. They are distinct additions to world literature.

The latter book could not be completed by Nivedita. She died when only one-third of the book was written and Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy took it upon himself to complete the book.

Indian art was yet another field in which Nivedita's contribution was no less remarkable. It would not be an exaggeration to say that her name will ever shine in the history of the revival of the ancient Indian art of the Ajanta, Rajput and Mogul styles. She was not an artist, but was a connoisseur of art and her inspiration, encouragement and guidance helped many a young artist to tread the obliterated tracks of ancient Indian art.

She believed that the rebirth of art was essential to the remaking of the nation. Her appreciation of the ideals of Indian art and her passion for its revival were derived from Swami Vivekananda. During her travels in northern India with the Swami in 1899, she understood the spiritual import of Indian Fine Arts In Chicago, the Swami helped her to prepare her lecture on 'Indian Arts and Crafts'. In the Paris Conference of 1900, the Swami gave a brilliant exposition of Indian art and dilated on the controversial subjects of Greek influence on Indian art, science, literature and culture. He proved that the views of the Western orientalists on these subjects were shallow and biased. Nivedita was convinced of the Swami's views and later became one of the chief critics of the theory of the Hellenic influence on Indian art.

Closely associated in this sphere with Nivedita was an Englishman, who can be considered as the foremost of the group of art connoisseurs and who brought about the aesthetic revival in India. He was Mr. E. B. Havell, head of the School of Art in Calcutta. He said to Nivedita: "I can teach a man to draw and paint, but I cannot make him an artist or a genius." Nivedita emphatically replied that she believed that love for country, love of fellowmen, pride of birth, hope for the future and dauntless passion for India could create wonders; these could make heroes out of dolts and original geniuses out of copyists.

Nivedita first met Mr. Havell in 1902. She had paid a visit to the Art School and was glad to know that Mr. Havell's views about Indian art tallied with her own. He often had discussions with Nivedita for he was eager to understand the mystery and esoteric meaning of Indian art. Nivedita instructed him as best as she could. Mr. Nandalal Bose has said: "I do not know whether Havell has mentioned the name of the Sister anywhere in his books, but she made him understand the viewpoints of Indian aesthetics and philosophy of art." He was the first foreigner to point out that Indian art was original and was not derived from Greece. "The Greeks no more created Indian Sculpture and Painting than they created Indian Philosophy and Religion," he declared in his book, *Indian Sculpture and Painting*. Throughout his published writings Mr. Havell answered the charge of the derivate character of Indian art. For his outspoken views he had to suffer the displeasure of his compatriots, as Nivedita once said, "Poor Havell! he had to suffer persecution at the hands of the prejudiced Anglo-Indian officialdom."

Mr. Ananda Coomaraswamy expressed the same views. Nivedita reviewed their books in the *Modern Review*. In her own writings she also tried to disprove the fiction of the Hellenic influence in creating the ideals of Indian art. Thus the three made a united effort to dispel the long-standing prejudice and misapprehension of the Western orientalists as to the claims and ideals of Indian art.

Mr. Okakura, the greatest Japanese authority on Asian art and archaeology, supported their views. Nivedita wrote an Introduction to his book *Ideals of the East*. The writings of these

people drew the attention of Western art connoisseurs like Sir John Woodroffe and Lord Kitchener.

The other contribution of Nivedita, Havell and Coomaraswamy was to define the function of Art schools in India. Besides Calcutta, there were Art schools in Madras, Travancore, Lahore and Bombay where the teachers were foreigners and the system followed was also foreign. These three declared unequivocally that the function of the Art school in India was not to introduce European methods and ideals but to gather up and revitalize the Indian traditions which were rapidly approaching extinction and to relate the work of Indian craftsmen to the life and thought of the Indian people.

When Nivedita came in contact with Mr. Abanindranath Tagore, the Vice-Principal of the Calcutta Art School, she saw that he too was imbued with foreign ideas. Due to Nivedita's influence he later turned to the Indian style. He acknowledged that she had opened the eyes of the Indians to the beautiful aspects of their own country, their own art and their own institutions. Her strong and clear vision of renaissance in art always appealed to him She once said: "Art must be reborn. Not the miserable travesty of would-be Europeanism that we at present know. There is no voice like that of art, to reach the people . . And art *will* be reborn, for she has found a new subject—India herself. Ah, to be a thinker in bronze and give to the world the beauty of the Southern pariah, as he swings, scarce-clad, along the Beach-Road at Madras! Ah, to be a Millet, and paint the woman worshipping at dawn beside the sea! Oh for a pencil that would interpret the beauty of the Indian Sari; the gentle life of village and temple; the coming and going at the Ganges side; the play of the children; the faces, and the labours, of the cows!"

When Abanindranath adopted the Indian style of art, Nivedita was full of praise for him. When his 'Bharat-Mata' or 'India the Mother' was painted, she was in ecstasy and wrote: "We see in this drawing something for which Indian art has long been waiting, the birth of the idea of those new combinations which are to make the modern age in India "

Later, she got his paintings reprinted in the *Modern Review* and wrote critical notes on them. Mr. Ramananda Chatterjee

translated her notes into Bengali and had them printed in the Bengali magazine *Prabasi*.

Let it not be understood from this that in her passion to see beauty in everything Indian Nivedita was blind to the beauties of Western art No, she was not. In order to demonstrate the true ideals of Western art she got reprints of good paintings, mostly religious ones, and got them printed in the *Modern Review* with critical notes. These were also translated into Bengali and published in the *Prabasi*. Thus she made Indians familiar with great Western masters like Raphael, Michelangelo, Millet, Rossetti, Titian, Morris and Burne-Jones, to mention a few.

With Abanindranath veering off the beaten track of imitation of foreign art the Art movement in India received a new vigour. Round him clustered his students and a new School of Art, known later as the Calcutta School, grew up. His students like Mr. Nandalal Bose, Mr. Surendranath Ganguly, Mr. Asit Kumar Haldar and Mr. Venkatappa later became famous artists. Besides the support of Mr. Havell and Nivedita, this school received full support from Mr. Coomaraswamy, Mr. Gaganendranath Tagore, Sir John Woodroffe and Mr. O. C. Ganguly. All of them met at Abanindranath's house at Jorasanko. The Indian Society of Oriental Art was founded by them in 1907 to make their objectives known to the nation as a whole. These pioneers of the new School had to face much criticism and their art was called 'degenerate' and 'crude' by the other Schools in India. Nivedita and other supporters of the Calcutta School often criticized them, on the other hand, for adopting Western methods of composition and manipulation of colours, for lack of originality and lack of Indian feeling.

Gradually, however, the artists of the Calcutta School were able to demonstrate their genius in the sphere of painting and established for themselves the foremost place in Indian art.

Nivedita took deep interest in the work of the younger group of artists and encouraged them. She got their paintings published in magazines and wrote critical notes on them. She met the artist Nandalal Bose when he was a student in the Art School. She visited the school one day and was impressed by Nandalal's paintings. She inspected some of his paintings

and pointed out the defects. For instance, seeing the picture of Mother Kali she said, "The image is not in proper order. Why have you put so many garments on her? Kali is sky-clad, She is Fearless and She is the Destroyer. Read the poem on Kali by Swamiji." Another picture of his pleased Nivedita immensely and she borrowed it from him. In it Dasaratha was shown lying in affliction after the departure of Rama to the forest, with Kausalya sitting near his feet holding a common palm-leaf in her hand. Laughingly she remarked: "Kausalya is the queen of a king, a valuable ivory fan only fits in her hand, not a fan made of palm-leaf. Go to the museum and see such handiwork. But the picture has got a lovely and peaceful atmosphere. It reminds me of the room of the Holy Mother, hence it pleases me much."

Later, one day, when Nandalal showed his new painting of 'Jagai and Madhai' to Nivedita she was very pleased. Jagai and Madhai were the two vagabonds who had beaten Mahaprabhu Chaitanya's follower, Nityananda Prabhu. Appreciating it, she asked him, "How did you get their facial expression?" He answered, "I drew the faces by meditating on Girish Babu." Hearing it she laughed and said after a pause, "Draw a picture after meditation. This is the principle of Indian drawing." She laughed at the common hookah attached to their girdles and said: "In Jagai's days, smoking of tobacco was not introduced. When painting a picture, you should read from books about the manners and customs of the time."

Before leaving the Art School she asked Nandalal to see her at her house. One day Nandalal and Surendranath went to her house. She was not in the house, so they sat on a sofa in the outer sitting room. When Nivedita came back she asked them to sit on the floor cross-legged and herself sat on the sofa. They felt a little offended at first, but, when they saw Nivedita pointedly looking at them and then saying, "You are all Buddhas", they understood her purpose in making them sit Buddha-like on the floor.

Once she sent Nandalal Bose and Asit Haldar to accompany Lady Harringham to copy fresh paintings at Ajanta. At that time without consulting them, she fixed the day of departure, handed them two railway tickets and funds for the journey.



(artists Surin ganguly & Nandalal (Bose)
Sister
Bose-para Lane
1908 or 1909.)

That was her way of giving directions and it was impossible to disobey her. After they reached Ajanta, Nivedita arrived there with Dr. J. C. Bose and Gonen Maharaj. After making arrangements for their stay she went away. Mr. Nandalal Bose has said: "The thought of the progress of Indian artists always dwelt in her mind. I can never say enough about the encouragement I received from her. When she died it was like being deprived of the presence of a guiding angel. It was Sister Nivedita who introduced me to the ideas of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda."

Mr. Asit Haldar said once: "That was the period of the renaissance of ancient Indian art. Nivedita was happy at this national awakening. Nandalal and myself often went to meet her at Baghbazar. . . . She used to advise us often not to leave this sphere of art and plunge into politics. Nivedita told us that on us depended the revival of ancient Indian art which was rapidly approaching extinction and that the revival of national art would be our great contribution in the movement of national awakening and freedom. She urged us to try our best. As long as she lived, she visited our exhibitions at the Oriental Art Society and encouraged the artists."

The last of such exhibitions which Nivedita attended was held in February 1910. The paintings of Mr. Surendranath Ganguly, Mr. Nandalal Bose, Mr. Venkatappa, Mr. Asit Haldar, Mr. O. C. Ganguly and Mr. Iswari Prasad were exhibited together with the pictures of Mr. Abanindranath Tagore and Mr. Gaganendranath Tagore. After visiting the exhibition Nivedita wrote a report on it in which she happily concluded: "And for ourselves, we came away much gladdened, for never had the continuity of the new school with the old, been so convincingly demonstrated, and we felt, in that fact, many miles nearer to our dream—the great Indian school of mural painting, historic, national and heroic, which is to be the gift of the future to the Chosen Land."

46. *Shadows of Gloom*

IN THE BEGINNING of her new life in India Nivedita went on her first journey to the Himalayas with the Swami. At the twilight of her life she again went on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas—this time to Kedarnath and Badrinarayan. She had with her as companions three others, Dr. Bose, Mrs. Abala Bose and their nephew Aurobindo Mohan Bose.

In the first week of June 1910, they left for Hardwar, the first stage of their journey. From there, stage by stage, they proceeded from one holy place to another together with the pilgrims from every part of India. Nivedita was thrilled She experienced the deep sense of Indian unity about which she had so often written. She wrote on the journey: "The fact is equally conspicuous, that the Motherland is indeed one, that north and south are inextricably knit together, and that no story of its analysed fragments, racial, lingual or political, could ever be the story of India."

In Hardwar they met Swami Kalyanananda who was in charge of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram at Kankhal. She liked Hardwar and felt it was Banaras on a small scale; the difference being only that people go to Banaras to die, and to Hardwar for a high undertaking. In the evening, they went to see the evening worship of the Ganges at Brahmakunda.

At Hardwar they met a good priest-guide of Kedarnath and his energy and resourcefulness helped them throughout the journey. The pilgrims—men and women—moved from one place to another as if they knew each other and yet, it seemed, they belonged to none. When passing by, they greeted each other thus: 'Jai! Kedarnath Swamiki Jai!' or 'Jai! Badri Bisal Lalki Jai!' Some were moving in groups, some by themselves telling beads or lost in thoughts.

On the way, Nivedita's party usually rested in Dak bungalows; but where these were not available, they spent the night even in Chattis or Dharmashalas. Nivedita noticed with interest

how the influence of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and Buddhism had all left their imprint on this land. The ascent of the last four miles was steep and very trying. The priest-guide ruefully said to Nivedita: "As hard as the way to heaven". But the beauty of the place was enchanting. Ultimately the temple was within sight and a shout of 'Jai Kedarnathjiki Jai!' from thousands of pilgrims rent the sky. They had striven hard to reach the temple on a Monday, the day sacred to Lord Shiva; but, when it was reached, it was already mid-day and the temple had closed only to be opened in the evening for Arati. As the afternoon ended, everything was enveloped in cold mists. But as darkness fell, mists had gone and the stars and snows were clear and bright. They were called to see the Arati. Blazing lights were waved and bells clanged within the temple. All stood still, lost in the world of their own reverence. "It was one of the sights of a lifetime", wrote Nivedita, "to stand there, in the black darkness at the top of the steps, and watch the pilgrims streaming in. It seemed as if all India lay stretched before one, and Kedarnath were its apex, while from all parts everywhere, by every road, one could see the people streaming onward, battling forward, climbing their way up—all for what? —for nothing else than to touch God."

The next day they visited the other temples of Satyanarayan and a goddess in the vicinity. From Kedarnath they took the route to Badrinarayan. On the way, they met two old women, almost blind and doubled up with age and infirmity, returning from Badrinarayan. Climbing over some difficult boulders, one of them stumbled. Nivedita rushed forward and showed concern, when they replied joyfully: "What! Is not Narayan leading? And since he has given Darshan, what does this matter?"

On the way, they met another solitary blind pilgrim. He had climbed up all the way by feeling the stones on the road. Nivedita stood lost in wonder and admiration. "Victory to the glory of God! Victory to Bharatvarsha!" she could not help saying to herself.

She enshrined these events in her mind and was never tired of repeating them to her students. She would say. "An old lady, her hair all turned grey, just got up from a dip into the cold waters of Alakananda, but she did not mind the cold. Her

clothes were still wet, as she stood there and offered salutations to the sun with folded hands"—saying thus she would herself fold her hands "How beautiful! Oh! How beautiful she looked! I went on watching her from a distance." Or again: "An old lady was walking over snows in front of me. The ice was melting, so she slipped often. I was afraid she would fall down; so, I softly asked her whether she would take my help. Should I hold her hand? She looked at me and answered me with only a smile. Oh! so sweet, so bright! But tapping her stick, she went her own way alone."

On June 3, they reached Badrinarayan. Early in the morning she went to the temple to attend the morning worship. But she was denied entrance as orthodoxy held its sway in that region For a moment she was taken aback. Had she walked up all this distance for being denied entrance into the temple! But accustomed to show respect towards orthodoxy, she soon overcame her disappointment and losing herself in prayers, she joined the pilgrims circumambulating the temple, telling their beads.

The fact that the temple building had undergone repairs and looked modern displeased Nivedita. According to their programme they stayed there for three days only. On their return they took the way to Karnaprayag via Chamoli and Nandaprayag. From here one way led to Kathgodam, which the pilgrims usually took. But to avail themselves of the facilities of the Dak bungalow, they took another route—to Kotdwara via Srinagar. They reached the plains on June 29.

On her return, she wrote out the description of the pilgrimage and it was published in the *Modern Review* under the caption 'The Northern Tirtha: A Pilgrim's Diary'. It was later published in book form and to indicate the particular nature of its contents it was entitled, *Kedarnath and Badrinarayan: A Pilgrim's Diary*.

On her return from her pilgrimage, she got the news of Mrs. Bull's illness Mrs. Bull had invited Nivedita to come to America. In the previous year Nivedita had returned from the West and therefore, she could not think of leaving India soon. Though she was worried, she wrote consoling, cheerful and hopeful letters to Mrs. Bull Sara Bull was her mother, friend, provider—all in one. Her money helped Christine to continue her

work with the school, Nivedita to publish her writings and Dr. Bose to publish his science books. Whatever Nivedita hoped to do in future depended on Mrs Bull's help. Dr. Bose's laboratory had to be built and the cause of national art had to be furthered. She had long desired to write the biography of Dr. Bose. She had been a witness to this brave Indian's grim, hour-to-hour struggle with antagonists. Who but herself could write his life better? But this year the premonition of death often cast shadows of gloom on her own mind. She needed the silence, peace and love of Mrs. Bull's motherliness to give her strength She wrote to her in September 1910:

"My wonderful 12 years is drawing to a close and I feel that in November when the Mintos go, I shall enter on a very dark period. I have still 2 years left, but no more. I am so afraid that I shall not be there to write his life. But I know you will leave a special legacy of £100 to S.K.R. or to N. for this purpose, not to pay expenses, but to pay for time. The life can easily be published in India and at Indian cost. And my papers will be at their disposal"

All her future work depended on Mrs. Bull's help. So the news of Mrs. Bull's prolonged illness made Nivedita more and more anxious.

In the Puja holidays she went as usual to Darjeeling. There she received a telegram that Mrs. Bull's condition was very serious and she desired Nivedita to be by her side. There was no alternative left for Nivedita now. She immediately left by steamer for America.

On November 15, she reached Cambridge in Boston where Mrs. Bull was staying. Mrs. Bull was very pleased to see her. The steadiness so characteristic of Mrs. Bull which had won her the name 'Dhira Mata' from the Swamiji was gone. She was always afraid of something and hardly allowed Nivedita to leave her bed-side. Nivedita talked to her of the old days, the memory of which still inspired them and strengthened them. Belur, Almora, Kashmir, Calcutta—they talked about these places, day after day. Nivedita was then editing the *Jnana-Yoga* of the Swami She frequently read passages from it to Mrs. Bull. When she found time, she went to the public library to read. That year a Universal Race Congress was held in London. Dr. Brojendranath Seal had been invited to

represent India and Nivedita was invited to speak. Being hard pressed for time she promised to send a written paper on the 'Position of Indian Women'. It was to be sent by the middle of December So, whenever she found time she worked on it and was able to send it on December 6.

Mrs. Bull's brother, Mr. E. G. Thorp and Olea, her daughter, came to see Mrs Bull during her last days. Mrs. Bull was very rich and Nivedita's presence near her gave rise to suspicions in the minds of her relations. Nivedita felt that her presence was upsetting Sara's relations; but she had to stay on with her for her sake. She had no claims to make, she had no greed of money, she prayed to God to give her strength to do her duty towards her friend till the end even if circumstances were unpleasant. A letter written to Miss MacLeod on December 7, 1910, betrays the fears in her mind. "Please pray for me, pray all of you, that I may be made loving, patient, silent, of an intense reserve. I am frightened, but I dare not take any help but God's own. Will all of you who believe in prayer, but only those who do, pray that this dear one, in grave dangers, may learn to be herself, and discriminate between the Real and the Unreal."

On December 11, she went to the church to pray for Sara. There it struck her that the Holy Mother was the Madonna. She returned home and immediately wrote a letter to the Mother which has been quoted before. After finishing the letter she felt better. She had nothing else to do for Sara, but to pray

On January 18, 1911, at five in the morning Sara breathed her last. Nivedita's only wish now was to return to India and to her work directly, but she had to stay on for a few days because of Mrs. Bull's will. According to previous arrangements, Mrs. Bull had left money for Nivedita's school and Dr. Bose's laboratory, but Olea suddenly took an extraordinary antagonistic attitude She was an hysterical lady and her obstinacy and whims had made her quarrel with her mother often. She had great love for Nivedita and Nivedita had often helped her to understand her mother's views. But this time she took a different attitude. It is said that she even suspected Nivedita to have poisoned her mother. The reason for this suspicion was that, in order to relieve her pain, Nivedita had administered

an Indian medicine to Mrs. Bull for some time. Whatever it was, some distrust was created in Olea's mind and she made Nivedita's stay in the house difficult. So, after Mrs. Bull's death, Nivedita quietly left the house and went to stay with another friend, Miss Alice Longfellow. Olea was determined to contest some of the provisions in the will. So ultimately leaving the matter to Mr. Thorp, the attorney, Nivedita decided to leave America.

Distressed as she was at Olea's attacks, Nivedita was further dismayed to receive news about Swami Sadananda's death. Since the Swami's death, Swami Sadananda had been Nivedita's greatest guide, philosopher and friend. During her plague relief work and later, in lecture tours to Bombay, Madras, Patna and Banaras, he had kept her company. The previous year when he had fallen ill, Nivedita had looked after his comforts. She had rented a house near her own and had made arrangements for his diet etc. Some boys served him but Nivedita went to him everyday and looked after him like a loving mother. Now he was no more. With a heavy heart, she left America.

On her return journey she went to England. Nivedita met her old friends Mr. Ratcliffe, Mr. Nevinson, Dr. Cheyne and others. They were happy at her unexpected arrival. From England Nivedita went to Paris and met Miss MacLeod and Miss Legget. Did they ever think that this was their last meeting with Nivedita? She took leave of them on March 23, 1911, when she embarked the *Delta* from Marseilles. As was her practice, she whispered 'Durga! Durga!' before the boat left its moorings.

47. *Passing into Eternity*

IT WAS APRIL 7, 1911. From a distance Nivedita saw the harbour line of Bombay. She was back again in India, the chosen land of her love and devotion. On coming to Calcutta, she met the Holy Mother who had returned from South India on April 11. The Mother, Swami Saradananda and all others were sad to hear about Mrs. Bull's death. The Mother spoke about Mrs. Bull for a long time. She left for her village Jayrambati on May 17.

One day Nivedita went to the Belur Math and met Swami Brahmananda and Swami Turiyananda. She entered the Swami's room and sat in silent contemplation for some time. The curious premonition of death was growing stronger within her In a letter written to Miss MacLeod in 1904 she had said:

"Do you remember how Cheiro foretold that I would die between the forty-second and forty-fourth year? I am now thirty-six. So I suppose I shall see this cycle too. I fancy I shall die in 1912. Will these years make a difference in the position of India? Shall I be allowed to see that I was of some use to Swamiji? I only want, I shall always only want, to be allowed to carry his burden. I don't care in the least about Mukti."

The same thoughts now assailed her mind. How much had she done to justify her claim to be the Swami's child? The lengthening shadows of the evening had cast their gloom all round. She prayed for light.

During the summer she went to Mayavati. With her were Dr. and Mrs Bose, and Aurobindo Bose, their nephew. During their one month's stay there, she helped Dr. Bose with his new book One day Dr. Bose delivered a lecture at the Ramakrishna Ashrama. On June 18, she addressed the Sadhus and Brahmacharis of the Ashram on 'Intellectual Culture' in which she stressed the point that no distinction need be made between secular and religious culture of knowledge. On June 26 they left Mayavati and reached Calcutta, via Kathgodam, on July 3.

Mrs. Bull's death created a new problem for Nivedita and she felt anxious about the future of the school. Mrs. Bull had all along helped her with money and she intended to bequeath some money to her also so that she could spend it for various causes that were dear to her heart. Nivedita felt that in case she herself died before Mrs. Bull, she should make known to her how she desired to utilize the money. She wrote:

> To Christine, for the work : £1000 plus my share of Swamiji's works, plus my books, plus £2000 from the bequest if it ever comes into my hands. And any bequests further.
>
> To the Nation: to be settled by a Committee of say three French and American artists, a prize of the interest of £1000, for the best cartoon of Indian History—in Oriental style—by an Indian artist, man or woman.
>
> To Science: the remaining £3000 of the bequest. This is to be at the disposal of my friend and to be used preferably for two I shall name. But according to the best of his ability for Indian Science. I would have been glad to remember Ireland. But that is not my business. If Christine wishes—she might set aside a small sum for that.

But now matters had changed. Olea was not prepared to give her even £1000. Nivedita would have easily foregone her claim if it had been for her personal use. But what about the school and Christine? She did not wish to leave Christine in difficulties. Had she wished, she could have got a loan from the Government, because Lady Minto was there to help. She was offered some financial help too. But Nivedita refused it for she did not desire to accept help from a foreign government for promoting the cause of national education. So much so that in her will she clearly expressed her wish that no help should be accepted for her school from a foreign government.*

* Though the school passed through many financial difficulties since then, it did not accept any Government help till 1949, when the national Government had come in

Ultimately, after passing many days in worry and restlessness, she was greatly relieved when she heard from the attorney, Mr. Thorp, that provision had been made in Mrs. Bull's will for her school.

On July 25, Swami Vivekananda's mother, Bhuvaneshwari Devi died. The day she died Nivedita was by her side and followed the dead body to the cremation grounds Two days later Bhuvaneshwari Devi's mother died. After a few days Nivedita received news that Mrs Bull's daughter Olea had died on July 18. It has already been said how inimically disposed Olea had been to Nivedita in America and had caused her much worry. But her sudden and unexpected death shocked Nivedita. On August 21 came the news of Swami Ramakrishananda's death. During her lecture tour in South India, Nivedita had come in close contact with this spiritual giant and since then had held him in great respect. He came to meet her whenever he came to Calcutta. It was he who encouraged her to write the life of Swami Vivekananda. Fourteen years of his life were given to the Swami's work and Nivedita always admired him as an ideal Karma-Yogin.

Christine who had gone to Darjeeling after Nivedita's return to India in 1909 returned to Calcutta in February 1910. But in April of the same year, for some personal reasons, she went to America She returned to India in the beginning of 1911, but after a few days' stay in Calcutta she left for Mayavati with Mr F. J. Alexander. For reasons unknown to us, a certain estrangement in feeling and understanding cropped up between Nivedita and Christine When Nivedita went to Mayavati in May 1911, Christine told her that she did not wish to live with her at 17 Bosepara Lane, and was thinking of taking up work at the Brahmo Girls' School. It was a rude shock to Nivedita Together they had worked for an ideal and pulled through many critical situations. Nivedita had never spoken a word against Christine to anyone. As her letters show, she was always full of praise for Christine. However, this unfortunate thing did come to pass and it added to Nivedita's depression Christine did not return to Bosepara Lane during Nivedita's lifetime. While she was in Mayavati, she received news of Nivedita's illness at Darjeeling. But

before she could go to Darjeeling, Nivedita had left this mortal world.

Anyhow, Nivedita returned to Calcutta from Mayavati in June. She found no respite from school work, her own writings and Dr. Bose's work. Three of her books *Footfalls of Indian History*, *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* and *Studies from an Eastern Home* were nearing completion. She also wrote 'In Memorium: Sara C. Bull' for the *Prabuddha Bharata*.

Mr. Dinesh Sen writes about an incident which took place at this time. He had a stone image of Prajna-Paramita with him. Nivedita liked it and asked for it. Mr. Sen said: "I hesitate to give this to you. I do not wish you to take it for it forebodes evil to the possessor."

Nivedita replied: "I do not expect to hear such a grandmother's tale from an historian like you." She practically forced him to part with it. She placed it in a niche in her room and decorated it with flowers and burnt incense in front of it. When Christine returned to the school three months after Nivedita's death she returned the image to Dinesh Babu for it had confirmed his fears.

In the midst of heavy work, Nivedita received a second rude shock—this time from another of her colleagues, Sudhira Devi, who left the school in September. The reason for her resignation is not known but it may be presumed that she was influenced by Christine's decision. She also desired to work in the Brahmo Girls' School. On her part however, Nivedita made an honest attempt to bring her back to the school. She depended on her help and greatly felt her need. Before the Puja vacation she went to Sudhira Devi's house to persuade her to join the school after the vacation. But Sudhira Devi said her decision was final. Of course, she later repented. When news reached her that Nivedita was lying ill at Darjeeling, she wanted to go to Darjeeling, but it was too late.

Before leaving Calcutta, Nivedita one day went to meet the famous old dramatist Girish Chandra Ghosh, a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Girish Babu was her neighbour. They talked for long about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He was ill then, but was engaged in writing his last drama *Tapobal*. Nivedita asked him to finish it soon so that

she might read it on her return from Darjeeling. But she never returned. Girish Babu dedicated the book to her with these words:

> Pure Nivedita, Child,
>
> You always rejoiced when my new dramas were staged. My new drama is being staged now, but where are you? When I was lying ill before you left for Darjeeling, you had tenderly said to me "I hope to see you well again on return.' I am still living, child, why do you not come to see me now? I hear that on your deathbed you remembered me. Engaged as you are in the Lord's work now, if you still remember me, accept this tearful gift of mine.
>
> Girish Chandra Ghosh.

As soon as the school closed for the Puja vacation Nivedita made preparations to go to Darjeeling. The Boses, as usual, were going with her. She went to the Mother's house and met Swami Saradananda, Golap-Ma and Jogin-Ma. The Mother was then in her village home. After bowing down to Jogin-Ma she said: "Jogin-Ma, I feel I will not return." "Why do you say so, Nivedita?" Jogin-Ma said anxiously.

"I do not know. I feel so somehow. This is the end."

Jogin-Ma asked her not to harbour such thoughts and changed the topic of conversation; but she could not help feeling worried about her.

Before she left Calcutta, some of her senior students came to meet her. Prafullamukhi, her favourite student, was laid down with fever. Nivedita met her and expressed her desire to take Prafullamukhi with her. But who would allow her to go?

The memory of Baghbazar where she first came to stay thirteen years ago bore the same enchantment for Nivedita still. She wrote thus in a letter to Miss MacLeod on September 5, 1911.

"Oh! what sweet memories crowd upon one, for these last thirteen years! How wonderfully full and deep is the wave that overwhelms the soul at twilight! 'Beyond life and death' as Swamiji always insisted. He was never contented to say either word alone. One has need of realizing that these days—

for death is taking so many, so many of those one has known and loved."

A deep, serene peace reigned in her heart. Was it a forerunner of the infinite peace she was soon to enter? Her feelings were echoed in her articles 'Beloved', 'Death' and 'Play' written in these last days of her life. Life was all play for one who realized that it is the Play of God. Characteristically she wrote:

> The ideals of the playground overflow into life itself. 'No gain but honour' becomes everywhere the watchword of the noblest lives. And the ideal itself crystallizes to its own soul aad essence: honour is conceived of, not as fame, or social comprehension and sympathy, but as innermost honour, something that is to mantle us secretly in the hour of Prayer,—a light burning within the oratory and lighting up the image,—a secret between ourselves and God.

In Darjeeling they put up at the Ray Villa. The first few days were spent quietly and restfully. One day they all decided to go to the distant Sandak Fu peak. It was two or three days' journey on horseback. On the day fixed for departure, Nivedita had an attack of blood dysentery. Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, a prominent physician of Calcutta, was then in Darjeeling and he was sent for. All necessary medical aid was given, but to no avail.

Every morning she greeted her anxious hosts with a bright smile and brave words. She talked of women's education and sundry subjects to divert their worried thoughts. But her life-energy was slowly ebbing away. Nivedita knew this was the end and she bravely faced it. She had learnt to consider life and death as the obverse and the reverse of the same coin; she was going beyond both.

> I thought last night that interfused with all this world of matter, penetrating it through and through, there may be another, call it meditation, or mind, or what one will, and that perhaps *that* is what death means. Not to change one's place—for since this is not matter, it can have no place—but to sink deeper and deeper into that condition of being more and more divested of the ima-

gination of body. So that our dead are close to us physically, if it comforts us to think so of them, and yet one with all vastness, one with uttermost freedom and bliss.

And so I thought of the Universal as mingled in this way with the finite and we standing here, on the borderline between the two, commanded to win for ourselves the paradise of both—the Infinite in the Finite. I am thinking, more and more, that Death means just a withdrawal into meditation, the sinking of the stone into the well of its own being. There is the beginning before death, in the long hours of quiescence, when the mind hangs suspended in the characteristic thought of its life, in that thought which is the residuum of all its thoughts and acts and experiences. Already in these hours the soul is discarnating, and the new life has commenced.

I wonder if it would be possible so to resolve one whole life into love and blessing, without one single ripple of a contrary impulse that one might be wrapt away in that last hour and for evermore into one great thought, so that in eternity at least one might be delivered from thought of self, and know oneself only as a brooding presence of peace and benediction for all the need and suffering of the world.

On October 7 she knew the end was coming and she prepared her will. What she had was for the Motherland—as in life, so in death

A few days before she came to Darjeeling, she had read a Buddhist prayer on Universal Love and Peace which she rendered into English and got printed for distribution to friends. At her request it was read out to her aloud—

"Let all things that breathe, without enemies, without obstacles, overcoming sorrow, and attaining cheerfulness, move forward freely, each in his own path!

"In the East and in the West, in the North and in the South, let all beings that are without enemies, without obstacles, overcoming sorrow and attaining cheerfulness, move forward freely, each in his own path."

As her mind was entering into deep meditation, she softly intuned her favourite Rudra-stuti:

"From the Unreal lead us to the Real! From Darkness lead us to Light! From Death lead us to Immortality! Reach us through and through ourselves, and evermore, O Thou Terrible! protect us from ignorance, by thy sweet compassionate Face."

On the morning of October 13, she said. "The frail boat is sinking but I shall yet see the sunrise." As these words were said, a ray of sunlight came streaming into the room while her soul soared higher up upon the wings of Eternity.

With lightning speed the news of the death of Nivedita spread in the small town of Darjeeling. Many prominent persons of Calcutta like Mr. Bhupendranath Bose, Dr. P. C. Ray, and Rai Nishi Kanto Sen Bahadur were in Darjeeling. All wended their way to the Ray Villa to pay homage to the departed, and then joined the funeral procession.

As the procession proceeded, it swelled in size and became the largest and most imposing funeral procession ever witnessed on the hill-station. The people in the market place stood in rows and every head was uncovered as a mark of respect, as the procession slowly and solemnly passed between them towards the Hindu cremation grounds.

At 4.15 in the evening the pyre was lit and all sat round in silent watch. Gonen Maharaj of the Ramakrishna Mission was there to perform the last funeral rites according to Hindu traditions. With tear-filled eyes and heavy hearts the processionists returned at 8 p.m. carrying at the head the urn containing the mortal remains of Nivedita.

In reverential memory of Sister Nivedita the public raised a Samadhi over the sacred spot where she was cremated. In the lap of the Himalayas, where silence reigns supreme, stands even today the memorial which proclaims—"HERE REPOSES SISTER NIVEDITA WHO GAVE HER ALL TO INDIA."

Thus ends the story of the dedicated soul, Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, whose life was a fulfilment of her earnest prayer: "God grant me to speak brave true words in my Guru's name before I die, words with his life flowing through them, untainted, unimpaired—that I may feel, passing into Eternity, that I have not disappointed him!"

Glossary

Advaita The Vedantic doctrine of monism as advocated by Sri Sankaracharya

Ālpanā Decorative designs made on the floor on festive occasions.

Ārati, Āratrika The waving of lights in front of an image.

Ārya Samāj A theistic organization of India founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati.

Āshrama Dwelling place of monks.

Bande Mātaram literally, I salute the Mother; the opening words of a song which became the national anthem of India in pre-Independence days; the slogan which was used during the first national movement in 1905 and which was prohibited by restrictive circulars by the British Government

Bhagavad-Gitā The most well-known scripture of the Hindus, a portion of the epic Mahābhārata.

Bhakta Devotee

Bhakti Devotion.

Bhakti Yoga The path of devotion.

Bhāva Samādhi Trance in which the devotee is in communion with God in a particular mood.

Bodhi Tree A tree in Bodh Gaya under which the Buddha attained Bodhi, illumination

Brahmachāri (fem *Brahmachārini*) One who takes the vows prescribed for religious students.

Brahmacharya Vows and rules prescribed for religious students.

Brāhman The One Absolute Reality, the Supreme Spirit

Brāhmo Samāj A theistic organization of India founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

Chaitanya Mahāprabhu	A prophet of Vaishnavism belonging to the 15th century.
Chaitra	Name of a lunar month, corresponding to March-April.
Chandi-Purāna	A portion of the Mārkandeya Purāna which narrates the story of Chandi, the Goddess Durgā.
Charkhā	Spinning wheel
Chatti	Resting place.
Chutney	A kind of sauce.
Dāndi	Litter.
Darshan	Paying a visit to or going into the presence of a Deity or a great spiritual person.
Dharma	Religion
Dharmashālā	Resting place.
Didi	Elder sister.
Durgā	A goddess representing an aspect of the Universal Power.
Ekādashi	The eleventh day of every fortnight of a lunar month, considered sacred by the Hindus.
Geruā	The ochre cloth of a monk.
Ghāt	Bathing place on a lake or a river.
Gowāllā	A person of the cowherd class
Guru	Spiritual teacher.
Jagaddhātri	A goddess representing an aspect of the Universal Power.
Jhee	Used in the sense of daughter in Bengali, but nowadays means a maid-servant.
Jnāna	Knowledge.
Jnāna Yoga	The path of knowledge; a book of the name by Swami Vivekananda.
Kaibartaka	A person of the fisherman class
Kāli	A goddess representing an aspect of the Universal Power.
Karma	Action.
Karma Yoga	The path of action without attachment.
Karma Yogin	One who follows the path of selfless action.
Kāyastha	The writer-caste.

Khanā	A learned lady renowned as a mathematician who lived about four hundred years ago.
Khooki	Baby-girl.
Kirtan	Act of singing aloud in concert the praises of God.
Kshatriya	A person of the warrior caste.
Kulin Brahmin	A Brahmin of the highest class.
Lilāvati	Wife of the renowned mathematician Bhaskar-acharya, who was herself a great mathematician.
Linga	literally, a sign. Shiva worshipped in the symbol of a stone.
Māhabhārata	The great Sanskrit epic which describes the rivalries between the Kauravas and the Pāndavas.
Mahanta	Abbot.
Mahārājā	King.
Mahāsamādhi	Death of an illumined person.
Maitreyi	Wife of Sage Yāgnavalkya, whose spiritual aspirations led her to the highest realization.
Mālā	Garland, necklace.
Mantra	Sacred formula used in Japa.
Math	Monastery.
Mukti	Salvation.
Naisthik Brahmacharya	Vows of life-long celibacy.
Panchavati	A group of five particular trees, the inter-twining growth of which is supposed to be a holy spot Here the reference is to one such grove planted in Dakshineswar temple-garden by Sri Ramakrishna himself.
Pandit	Learned man
Parama Guru	The spiritual teacher of one's own spiritual guide.
Paramahamsa	An ascetic of the highest rank.
Pāthashālā	School.
Prajnā Pāramitā	Goddesss of learning of the Buddhists.
Pranām	Obeisance.
Prasād	Food or drink that has been offered to a Deity.

Pujā	Ritualistic worship.
Purāna	Name of certain well-known sacred Sanskrit works which are supposed to have been composed by Vyāsa and contain the whole body of Hindu mythology.
Rajas	The constituent quality, the centre of great activity.
Rākhibandhan	The full moon day of the month of Srāvana when a sacred thread is tied round the wrists of beloved ones for protection.
Rāmāyana	The celebrated epic of Vālmiki which describes the adventures of Sri Rāmachandra
Rāmalilā	A Hindu religious festival which is observed annually in North India when the life of Sri Rāmachandra is enacted by dance, music and drama.
Rishi	Sage with prophetic vision.
Rudrāksha	Beads made from the berries of the Rudraksha tree, used in making rosaries.
Sādhaka	An aspirant devoted to the practice of spiritual discipline.
Sādhanā	Spiritual discipline.
Sādhu	A holy person.
Samādhi	Ecstasy, trance, communion with God.
Samskāras	Rites, ceremonies.
Sanātana Dharma	The Eternal Religion, refers to Hinduism.
Sankarāchārya	The great expounder of Advaita Vedanta.
Sannyāsa	Monastic vows which entail complete renunciation of the world and its attachments.
Sannyāsin	(fem. *Sannyāsini*) One following the monastic life.
Saraswati	Goddess of Learning.
Sāri	Length of cotton or silk wrapped round body, worn as main garment by Hindu women.
Sāvitri	A princess of Madra country married to a prince called Satyavan Her faithfulness brought back her husband to life. She is always quoted as the ideal wife.
Shakti	The Universal Power.

Shāstra Scripture.

Shiva The great, blissful and auspicious God of the Hindus.

Shraddhā Faith.

Shuka The son of Vyasa and the narrator of the Bhāgavata, regarded as the ideal monk.

Sitā The daughter of King Janaka of Videha, and wife of Sri Rāmachandra of Ayodhya. Her purity, faithfulness and sacrifice have become ideals for all Hindu wives.

Swadeshi literally, of one's own country. Refers to the movement which popularized the use of indigenous products and boycott of foreign goods.

Swāmi A title of a monk belonging to the Vedantic School.

Tapasvi (fem. *Tapasvini*) One undergoing religious austerities.

Tapasyā Religious austerity.

Tongā A four-wheeled carriage for two drawn by one horse.

Tulsi Basil plant considered to be very sacred by the Hindus.

Ubhaya Bhārati Learned queen of King Mandana Misra. When Sankaracharya and Mandana Misra were engaged in a philosophical controversy, Ubhaya Bhārati was made the judge and her verdict in favour of Sankaracharya was accepted as final.

Umā Consort of Shiva.

Upanishads The Vedantic Scriptures.

Vaishnavas The devotees of Lord Vishnu.

Vānaprastha The third stage of life when one retires to forest to practise spiritual disciplines.

Vedānta The philosophical treatises which followed the Vedas.

Vedas The Scriptural Texts of the Hindus.

Yoga The path or course which leads to union with the Supreme Spirit; thus *Bhakti Yoga* means the path of devotion etc.

Yogi An ascetic.

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